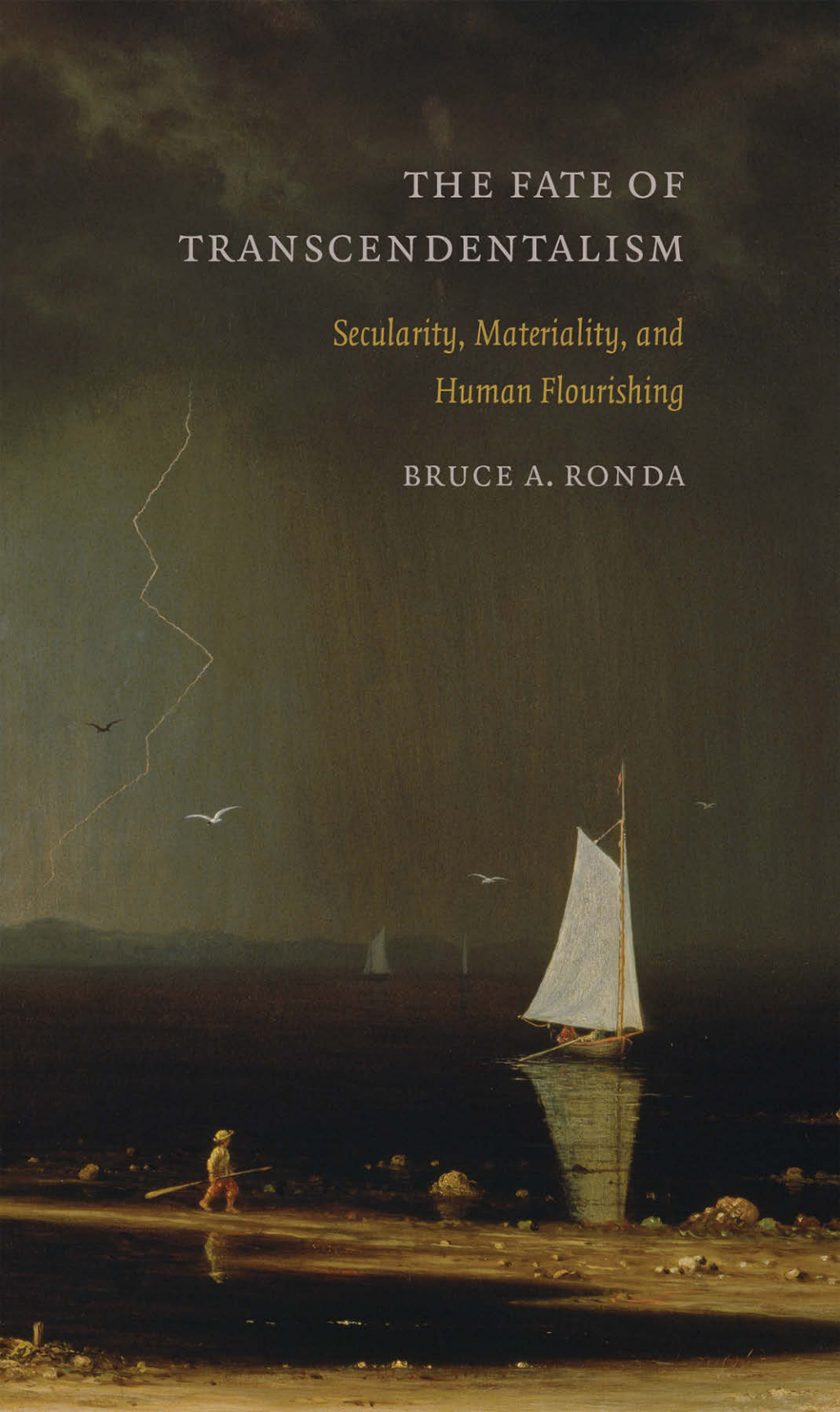

THE FATE OF TRANSCENDENTALISM

Secularity, Materiality, and Human Flourishing

BRUCE A. RONDA

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THE FATE OF TRANSCENDENTALISM

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THE FATE OF TRANSCENDENTALISM

Secularity, Materiality, and Human Flourishing

BRUCE A. RONDA

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In memory of
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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix

Introduction 1

ONE } *Transcendentalism and the Secular Turn* 11

TWO } *Transcendentalism in the Postwar Years* 38

THREE } *Gender, Reform, and Ridicule* 61

FOUR } *Charles Ives: Sound* 83

FIVE } *Joseph Cornell: Things* 115

SIX } *Truman Nelson: Rage* 143

SEVEN } *Beston, Oliver, Dillard, and Fluid Transcendentalism* 173

Epilogue 197

NOTES 203

BIBLIOGRAPHY 223

INDEX 241

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THE FATE OF TRANSCENDENTALISM

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Introduction

This book emerged from reflection on three classic moments in the annals of American transcendentalism. The first is Ralph Waldo Emerson's often-quoted passage in "Self-Reliance": "On my saying, What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within? my friend suggested—'But these impulses may be from below, not from above.' I replied, 'They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil.'"[1] The second is Henry Thoreau's deathbed exchange with his Aunt Louisa: to her inquiry about whether he had made his peace with God, Thoreau's response was, "I did not know we had ever quarreled, Aunt."[2] The third forms part of several striking episodes in Caroline Dall's recollections of Margaret Fuller's Conversations, in which Fuller expresses her preference for models of human behavior drawn from the classical rather than the biblical tradition. In one such exchange, the group's discussion of the connection between wisdom and suffering moves fluidly from Greek to biblical representations, and there is chuckling at the notion of a "Christian serpent."[3]

For contemporary readers, these may be seen as cheeky or touching ripostes to conventional thinking, or bold moves to reach for Enlightenment models of behavior rather than biblical ones. But, looked at another way, they are startling, even shocking comments in the context of centuries of reflection and conflict about the place and origin of evil and the nature of humanity's relation to the divine. No quarrel between divine and mortal? No ancient warfare between God and Satan for the soul of humanity? How is it that these writers and the circle to which they belonged could so readily see themselves as outside, or at the edges of, a vast tradition that had shaped Western culture and their own newly formed nation?

This book is an effort to answer that question by posing another: what has become of the creative and reformist movement in the United States called transcendentalism? I use the present perfect tense "has become" to signal that American transcendentalism lived and lives beyond the dates of its historical life, roughly the 1830s to the 1860s. The title of this book, *The Fate of Transcendentalism*, is deliberately ambiguous. To the extent that the word "fate" suggests "unavoidable destiny or end," it might lead to a sense that transcendentalism experienced a moment of literary and cultural ascendency, followed by a scat-

tering of its energies, with efforts to recall its peak years through memoir and biography. Certainly the historical moment passed, its adherents aged and died, new social and economic challenges emerged in the postwar years. But an understanding of transcendentalism as radical explosion followed by fragmentation and decline confuses the individuals of the movement with the theory of the movement. So we might adjust the meaning of "fate" to suggest something less unidirectional: what did transcendentalism make, or prompt, or encourage to happen? This would make transcendentalism an agent rather than a recipient of change or victim of circumstance.

What follows is an effort to discern the lineage of transcendentalism in the years after its historical moment. It is not another history of transcendentalism, of which we have two recent excellent examples, Barbara L. Packer's *The Transcendentalists* and Philip F. Gura's *American Transcendentalism: A History*, both from 2007. We have had new material and fresh interpretations offered in essay collections edited by Charles Capper and Conrad Edick Wright, *Transient and Permanent: The Transcendentalist Movement and Its Contexts*, and by Jana L. Argersinger and Phyllis Cole, *Toward a Female Genealogy of Transcendentalism*. We have ongoing archival work in the papers of Mary Moody Emerson and Caroline Dall, and new researches into the work of Caroline Sturgis and Ellen Sturgis Tappan. All that is enriched by the continuing outpouring of journal articles, essay collections, anthologies, monographs, and biographies that accumulate yearly. I offer a different approach, much as it is deeply informed by the works of many others.

The central argument in *The Fate of Transcendentalism* is that transcendentalism is an early example of secularity in American culture. I complicate this claim by emphasizing other distinctive aspects of transcendentalism, particularly its collective nature and its differing emphases when shaped by various practitioners. In tracing the movement's secularity, I advance a theory of transcendentalism that will aid in gauging its influence in successive generations. That theorizing is the task of chapter 1. Here I only forecast what is to come in that chapter and in the ones that follow. Most of all, I stress the liveliness and persistence of transcendentalism as a thread or strain in culture, evident or implied in several sometimes surprising places. I choose the word "persistence" deliberately, because in addition to explaining my version of the shape of transcendentalism, I also intend to tell a story about what happens to transcendentalism and what transcendentalism makes happen. Mine is one version, and other versions should be told, but here I emphasize the persistence of the movement in art forms, social activism, and critical treatments.

Something else: resituating transcendentalism as a distinctive version of secularity helps in relieving some of the challenges of the movement's name. In the early nineteenth century, the transcendental philosophy of Kant and his suc-

cessors contributed to an attack on Lockean sensationalism that was perceived (whether happily or with alarm) in many quarters as subversive of organized religion and political order. But in the post–Civil War years, anything "transcendental" began to look like outmoded philosophical idealism and misguided optimism about human nature. So Henry James could satirize transcendentalist and educational reformer Elizabeth Peabody in *The Bostonians* as "a confused, entangled, inconsequent, discursive old woman, whose charity began at home and ended nowhere."[4] Today, while the word "transcendent" is everywhere in popular culture, usually interchangeable with "amazing" or "awesome," in academic discourse "transcendent" or "transcendental" are still synonyms for "idealist" or "foundational" and therefore deeply suspect. So to recuperate transcendentalism as a meaningful cultural resource involves some rethinking of what the movement signified, and what it has contributed to the cultural mix. What if we refuse to think of transcendentalism as Orestes Brownson did, as the end of something, the ultimate dissolution of Christianity?[5] What if we de-emphasize the eschatological/providential strain in transcendentalism that was all about the irresistible unfolding of the perfection of humanity through the perfection of the self? We might even try calling "transcendentalism" something else, like "immanentism," as Wesley Mott and David Robinson suggest would be better.[6] But since it is too late for that, I want to identify transcendentalism as a secular, experimental, pragmatic set of efforts (collective, individual, expressive, institutional) to reshape the possibilities of human flourishing without recourse to extra-worldly intervention, but also without wholly abandoning either traditional religious/Christian language or the possibility of experiences that feel like they come from somewhere else. Finally, I propose that we think of transcendentalism as being so restlessly critical and self-critical that some of its adherents and heirs could seek, eventually, to decenter human flourishing altogether, and begin to imagine a vital cosmos in which humans have a part, but only a part.

Even so, reading transcendentalism as American secularity only begins to resolve the problems involved in rehabilitating the movement. Discerning the influence of this or that major writer or thinker on subsequent individuals or generations is one thing, and such projects are regularly pursued. Looking at a movement like transcendentalism as a whole is much more problematic, first because of its diversity and the difficulty of generalization. Second, and much more challenging, are the assumptions and claims of the movement that now seem quaint or offensive or useless as cultural resources. Besides the problems inherent in the name of the movement, there is the movement's persistent dualism, its preference for elevating mind over matter, and its persistent (though not consistent) separation of the human from the nonhuman. Here it is worth reminding ourselves that while the nineteenth-century transcendentalists were mostly

Platonists in one sense or another, they were equally bent, as the following paragraphs suggest, on a project to locate meaning not in a realm of eternal forms or in a divinely shaped cosmos governed by a distant deity. Rather, the secularity toward which they groped was an earthly one, in which biblical accounts and ecclesiastical practices became metaphors for the movement toward human fulfillment.

Modern and contemporary sociologists since Emile Durkheim and Max Weber have studied the apparent decline of organized religion in societies that experienced urban growth, technology-driven production and communication, and increasing specialization in employment. For many of these observers, this process, usually labeled "secularization," is inevitable, as people move away from homogenous communities and as religious truth-claims give way to scientific explanations. More recently, however, sociologists and others have recognized that religion does not simply "go away" in the face of these shifts and have sought to understand more fully the dialectic between social change and continued religious belief. In thinking about these issues, I am indebted to several sociologists of religion, including Vincent Pecora and Jose Casanova, but I have been most influenced by the work of Charles Taylor, particularly *A Secular Age* (2007). Echoing other theorists like Peter Berger, Taylor argues that the contemporary Western world's turn toward the secular arises from reform movements within the Western church (which he calls Latin Christendom to distinguish it from branches of Orthodox Christianity). Taylor is most interested in a situation he describes as "secularity" (or, more precisely, "secularity 3") to distinguish it from a simple rejection of religious belief and activity or its banishment from the public sphere. Our contemporary moment, he argues, is one of continuing dialectical relationship between this-worldly claims for human flourishing (what he calls the "immanent frame") and religious/spiritual claims for otherworldly truths. Both "sides" challenge or, in Taylor's words, "cross-pressure" each other. Taylor's construct here is distinguished from the process of secularization that sociologists have, until recently, thought to be irresistible, and from secularism, which suggests the kind of hostility to religion evident in recent books like Sam Harris's *The End of Faith* or Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*. Rather, Taylor acknowledges that, for many people, religion's (especially Judeo-Christianity's) narrative is no longer normative but must jostle with other truth-claims. At the same time, in Western societies (not to mention other parts of the world) religion has not vanished, but rather has morphed and changed and presents its own challenges to what appear to be dominant secular narratives.[7]

I use Taylor's concept of secularity as a way to understand the particular nature of nineteenth-century transcendentalism and its continuing impact

on American culture. In my view, transcendentalism is the first organized example of such secularity in the United States, though I use the word "organized" loosely and advisedly, given transcendentalists' famous lack of agreement with each other over much of anything. As I show in chapter 1, transcendentalism arises within liberal Protestantism and pushes beyond it in efforts to achieve "human flourishing." While most transcendentalists make use of religious language and references, they de-divinize that language to stress individual fulfillment and social justice. They imagine, and work to bring about, an alternative and more democratic reality for living. Most nineteenth-century transcendentalists, in my view, embrace this secular and utopian goal. At the same time, following Taylor's approach to secularity, I see transcendentalists as refusing to give up the possibility of "limit experiences" that test the boundaries of ordinary life and push toward the interactive and inexpressible. Here I readily acknowledge the influential scholarship of *Natural Supernaturalism*, in which M. H. Abrams traces a similar tendency among English and continental romantics: "This retention of traditional Christian concepts and the traditional Christian plot, but demythologized, conceptualized, and with all-controlling Providence converted into a 'logic' or dialectic that controls all the interactions of subject and object, gives its distinctive character and design to what we call 'Romantic philosophy.'"[8]

So, one purpose of the book is to suggest that American transcendentalism be understood not only under the aegis of transatlantic romanticism, nor only as Puritan antinomianism redivivus, nor as a family quarrel among liberal Christians that spilled over into the realms of social and political reform. Rather, transcendentalism is a version of the secular, and the arguments about it are arguments about secularity. Chapter 1 traces the emergence of secular thinking in the new American republic and particularly as it impacted the liberals who would become transcendentalists. But, as I stress throughout, the emergence and flourishing of transcendentalism in the early and mid-nineteenth century was not the work of just a few, but rather was a collective effort. Chapter 1 ends with a portrait of transcendentalism that emphasizes this collective, networking, aspect of the movement and traces the thread of secularity. I also offer a way of understanding the movement that distinguishes between a "dense" version, one that emphasizes human flourishing as the primary value, and an emergent version I call "fluid transcendentalism," one that challenges even that human-centeredness in preference for a relocation of human persons in a vital cosmos.

I then propose that, while we understand transcendentalism to have a historical moment in time, we may also see it exerting influence on subsequent generations of thinkers, writers, artists, and activists. Chapter 2 describes two post–Civil War contexts in which the meaning of transcendentalism was fiercely debated, the Free Religion movement and the Concord School of Philosophy,

Bronson Alcott's adult education series of the late 1870s and early 1880s. Some Free Religion advocates saw in transcendentalism a post-Christian religiously inflected humanism that was a resource in countering more conservative Unitarian efforts to make their movement into a Protestant denomination. Ironically, other Free Religionists saw even that heritage as suspect, because of its willingness to credit personal spiritual experiences as valid claims to truth, and wanted to ground all truth-claims in neutral and universal scientific knowledge. A decade later, transcendentalism was on the agenda at the Concord School of Philosophy, where the appearance of aging leaders like Alcott, Emerson, and Peabody reminded attendees of the prewar heritage. But the meaning of that heritage was elusive: to some, it still was redolent of social radicalism and atheism; to others, the lingering effect of transcendentalism distracted the sessions from the troubling yet stimulating implications of new scientific insights in biology and geology.

By the 1880s, transcendentalism had diffused and spread out in the cultural and reform milieus, still championed by some, but under attack or ridicule by others. The most notorious example of the latter was the treatment of Elizabeth Peabody in Henry James's novel *The Bostonians*. Here an exploration of exactly why the lightly fictionalized portrait of Peabody as Miss Birdseye was so scandalous and yet so amusing leads to a consideration of the fate of transcendentalism in an era of liberal scientific reform. For many younger reformers, the transcendentalists' experimental, often evanescent, and individual-focused efforts at social reform seemed hopelessly inadequate in a new era of immigration, urbanization, and bureaucracies. The one area where transcendentalist individuality was welcome was that of biography and memoir, and the last quarter of the nineteenth century saw a remarkable outpouring of such treatments of the antebellum figures. Here I turn attention to the career of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, who kept the transcendentalists, and himself, before the public eye—but often at the expense of textual and historical accuracy—and I compare Sanborn's appropriation of transcendentalism to that of Elizabeth Peabody. While both Peabody and Sanborn took to reminiscence in their older years, Sanborn's had a distinctly genealogical and memorial quality, while Peabody actively sought to extend transcendentalism into late nineteenth-century reform, influencing the work of Jane Addams and other Progressive reformers.

In successive chapters, I turn to a set of twentieth- and twenty-first-century figures whose work engages the distinctive features of the nineteenth-century movement that I find most compelling: its experimentalism, its restlessness, and its "secularity" as Taylor describes it. In thinking of the individuals, movements, and trends that might in some way be linked to transcendentalism or feature transcendentalist traits, we find that the list grows alarmingly long. We

may mean a poetic movement that derives from Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller, moves to Whitman and Dickinson, and is evident in Allen Ginsberg, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, A. R. Ammons, Annie Dillard, and Mary Oliver, among many others. We may intend an eco-critical movement that references Thoreau and extends to John Muir, Henry Beston, May Sarton, Anne LaBastille, and an array of contemporary scholars and critics. Transcendentalism may suggest a sociopolitical movement that embraces Thoreau, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Fuller, George Ripley, Sophia Ripley, John Brown, Caroline Dall, Jane Addams, Martin Luther King Jr., counterculture and communitarianism in the 1960s and early 1970s, and the Occupy movement. Transcendentalism may constitute one thread in a feminist consciousness that springs from Fuller, Dall, Ednah Dow Cheney, and Julia Ward Howe, and moves into second- and third-wave feminism. Or, the movement's name may suggest religious revolt that moved from a Unitarian family quarrel to fascination with world religions and a widespread embrace by millions of Americans of the notion of being "spiritual but not religious." Far from fading into an object of nostalgia and tourist destination, one might plausibly argue that transcendentalism succeeded so dramatically well, its influence so soaked into the culture, that it is difficult to trace one major "transcendentalist" strand among the several that make up the contemporary scene.

Some omissions may be surprising to readers. Why no Whitman? No Dickinson? Whitman's homage to Emerson is well known, both in his tribute in *Leaves of Grass*—"I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil"—and in his inclusion of Emerson's congratulatory letter in that work's second edition. Jerome Loving has convincingly established the transcendentalism of *Leaves of Grass*.[9] Dickinson read Emerson's poems and may have seen confirmations of her own spare prosody in his sometimes gnomic verse. While there is always room to say more, I push the case for the continuing influence of transcendentalism beyond the most well-known figures into individuals, texts, and controversies less known or less explored.

Like the nineteenth-century transcendentalists and their heirs in the latter decades of that century, Charles Ives, Joseph Cornell, Truman Nelson, Henry Beston, Mary Oliver, and Annie Dillard work in several modes of expression, and so call for commentary that borrows from several disciplines. These "interdisciplinary entanglements," to borrow Stephanie LeMenager's fine phrase from another context, are the necessary (and productive) results of thinking about transcendentalism holistically, as a movement and a practice, rather than as background noise for a few prominent figures.[10] Among twentieth- and twenty-first-century figures, I am most interested in those who absorb the secularity of transcendentalism and "spin" (a favorite term from Taylor) it in ways that

extend and complicate its insight and make it relevant to the modern and contemporary eras. These are the figures who literally (Ives, Nelson, Dillard, Oliver) or by implication (Cornell) talk back to transcendentalists without rejecting their insights. Each of these figures is "nested" among others who are moving in similar directions, in the midst of cultural changes beyond the range of the nineteenth-century transcendentalists. So the account I offer is not simply episodic and anecdotal, but also historical and embedded. I mean to show how each figure is located in a historical moment and responds to a perceived or implied transcendentalist heritage in ways that are distinctive to that moment. In that way I stress that the figures I have chosen are not nostalgic for transcendentalism, but rather appropriate, use, creatively distort, and extend the nineteenth-century movement for their own purposes.

The Fate of Transcendentalism navigates in tricky waters, some well traveled, others marked by conflicting charts or no charts at all. The entire idea of linking transcendentalism with secularity may seem outlandish and unproductive. My post-nineteenth-century objects of study are similarly a mix of the obvious and the startling. Some, like Ives, are familiar and have been extensively studied. Others, like novelist and social activist Truman Nelson, have been the focus of only a handful of critics. Joseph Cornell has received attention almost solely from art historians and critics, and his massive dossier "GC 44" has not, to my knowledge, been explored as a cultural and literary record before the present effort. Mary Oliver, Henry Beston, and Annie Dillard are boldface writers, and readers have long noted Dillard's connection to transcendentalism. How these writers appropriate the transcendentalist heritage and their connections, at important points in their careers, to the post-human and "materialist" extensions of transcendentalism are new contributions to our understanding. Another book, or several, should extend the conversation into other creative figures whose works dialogue with the fertile nineteenth-century movement.

Finally, I offer some comments on method. As in my previous book on representations of the militant abolitionist John Brown, which was also interdisciplinary in its scope, here I treat essayists, novelists, poets, a composer, a visual artist, and an activist/polemicist.[11] This heterogenous mix of subjects raises the question of how I approach their materials and with what claims to expertise. With regard to Ives, I readily acknowledge that I am not a musicologist and do not for the most part make observations about his compositional techniques and achievements. The main body of the Ives chapter deals with *Essays before a Sonata* and how we might understand Ives's appropriations of transcendentalism, and so I perform a kind of source analysis of that set of essays. But I see in Ives's prose some of the same creative tension between the drive for engage-

ment with the fragmented material conditions of modern democratic life and the hunger for extraordinary experiences that marks his music and that marked the secularity of the nineteenth-century transcendentalists. So a study of the ambitions and achievements of Ives's prose necessarily involves reflections on the peculiar sonic qualities of his music. Similarly, I focus most attention on Joseph Cornell's largely unexplored dossier of written materials, "GC 44," which I read for its artful and evocative prose and its links to transcendentalist and romantic understandings of limit experiences. As with Ives, some of the same drives—toward collection of disparate materials, juxtapositions of items, and private references—that mark the writing are also features of Cornell's artwork. Thus, a study of the literary qualities and references in the dossier leads me, though not an art historian, to consideration of Cornell's artworks *Bébé Marie* and *The Crystal Cage*.

The chapter on Truman Nelson, a figure I have explored in earlier scholarship, returns us to somewhat more familiar ground for literary analysis. But Nelson's reputation, such as it is, cannot rest on the artistry of his novels, which are for the most part plodding and overlong, but on the very existence of the novels as efforts to recover transcendentalism and its figures as viable resources for the contemporary moment. The same can be said for much else in Nelson's career as a man of letters, through his passionate engagement in a variety of forms—essays, speeches, polemics, letters—with the nineteenth-century movement and his insistence that transcendentalism as secular radicalism speaks to mid-twentieth-century Americans.

The work of writers Henry Beston, Mary Oliver, and Annie Dillard further reveals the influence of transcendentalism on literary form and expression. The chapter devoted to these figures reads their work in light of the "fluid transcendentalism" I see emerging in Thoreau's late work. To the extent that the more-than-human world "glows" with energy, it is not suffused by some external source, but rather arises from within its own materiality. This is the secular insight present in Beston's *The Outermost House*, in Oliver's poems in *American Primitive* and elsewhere, and persistently in Dillard's work from the mid-1970s to the mid-2000s, an insight aligned with the work of contemporary ecomaterialist and ecofeminist critics.

Finally, my argument here is that transcendentalism and its heirs represent a bold and resonant theme in American culture. Transcendentalism, of course, is not representative of the richness and variety of cultural forms in the United States; no one movement or set of texts could do that. I do claim, on the other hand, that transcendentalism has had a grip on the imaginations of many activists, writers, and thinkers from the 1860s to the present day. For me,

the particularly "secular" identity of transcendentalism, as this book defines it, helps us understand and talk about that continuing influence. Perhaps most of all, I intend to raise up a fascinating, endlessly creative, bold, and sometimes outrageous collection of American selves, put them in conversation with their transcendental ancestors, and see what happens.

ONE } *Transcendentalism and the Secular Turn*

In 1950, Perry Miller observed that, at root, American transcendentalism was a "religious demonstration," an expression of "religious radicalism in revolt against a rational conservatism" and "a protest of the human spirit against emotional starvation." Transcendentalism, he wrote, is best understood as having an "inherently religious character," rather than being seen as primarily a literary movement. What was being demonstrated was a protest against the Unitarian marriage of liberal Christianity and Enlightenment rationalism, a restless radicalism that Miller connected to other generational revolts "by the youth of America against American Philistinism."[1]

To the thousands of Americans caught up in the revivals of evangelical Protestantism that periodically swept the nation in the decades between the early 1800s and the late 1850s, Miller's claim that transcendentalism had anything to do with religion as they understood it would have been met with skepticism, if not derision. Abandoning the orthodox Calvinist emphasis on predestination, revivalist preachers were confronting listeners with the enormity of their sin *and* with the opportunity to seize the gift of salvation. Believers were encouraged to exercise a spiritual freedom of choice, one that echoed the expanding white male enfranchisement in those decades, but also found a parallel between politics and salvation that would at the same time be employed by advocates of women's rights. In contrast to this deeply emotional yet also highly engineered mass movement, marrying earthly democratic values with a new commitment to the supernatural divine, transcendental radicalism could well appear to be a frail alternative.

I embrace Perry Miller's claim that transcendentalism was a "demonstration"—a collective undertaking about which some general claims can be made, despite the movement's own whimsical sense, even then, that the only thing that bound its adherents together was their penchant for disagreement. But I also engage and complicate Miller's claim that what was being demonstrated could be called "religious," at least as the term was understood in the nineteenth century. Certainly, the religious debates that pitted orthodox Calvinists against liberals and then Unitarian liberals against some transcendentalists involved arguments about authority, miracles, the status of scripture, the nature of the trinity, the personhood of Jesus and the supposedly unique revelation of the di-

vine in his ministry, and, most of all, the relationship between the divine and the human. All these subjects were substantial and hugely significant for the disputants. So, in one sense, most readers would find Miller's claim to be commonsensical: transcendentalists, especially those at work in the mid to late 1830s and into the 1840s, many of them Unitarian clergy, were steeped in religion. They talked religion, they wrote about it, they were consumed by it, even if their evangelical and orthodox neighbors would and did scorn their claims and insights.

At the same time, transcendentalists were taking initial but decisive steps that led them away from the religious landscape of most of their fellow Americans, toward a secular, human, and this-worldly identity, though not without struggle, regret, and nostalgia. Transcendentalists in the nineteenth century were taking their first steps toward secularity along with others in North America, the United Kingdom, and Europe. Some critics and theorists, particularly in Germany, had already advanced toward atheism, while others, including many American transcendentalists, clung to historical language and biblical references. Still, in one form or another, transcendentalism's embrace of secularity, while halting, was a collective, forward-looking enterprise that emphasized experimentation and innovation in individual behavior, social reform, and creative expression. Transcendentalists were not, nor were most of their descendants, secular materialists, wedded to a mechanistic and deterministic view of the universe. They were convinced of the distinctive nature of intensely felt experiences that exceeded ordinary life's routines and interactions.

For the transcendentalists and their legitimate heirs, meaningful lives were lived and grounded in the human sphere. In their formulations, everything about the divine was relocated in the human; all the questions of authority were referred to human confirmations. All the social reforms that transcendentalists championed (however imperfectly and belatedly), including educational reform, abolition of slavery, communitarianism, labor, the fuller involvement of women in public life, and the encouragement of women's sense of self-worth, had as their final goal what they understood to be the kingdom of God on earth: the redemption of society from all sin and limitation, the ultimate democracy, the triumph of human flourishing. I thus propose that much of the nineteenth-century transcendentalist project can be understood as a turn toward *human flourishing* that, with some careful definition, I find useful to call "secular." Following Jose Casanova, I use "secular" and "secularity" to refer to frames of reference that are differentiated from religious perspectives although often dialectically related to and springing from those perspectives.[2] To return, though, to Miller's formulation about transcendentalism being a "religious demonstration": A "demonstration" yes, in the sense of something acted out, revealed, experimented, innovated. "Religious"? Not so obviously, since the nineteenth-century

transcendentalists were remaking the term in their small but influential corner of American culture.[3]

This secular humanist thrust constituted the mainstream of American transcendentalism in the movement's heyday. In invoking the "secular turn," *The Fate of Transcendentalism* engages Miller's insight by bringing to bear some of the considerable literature devoted to secularity, and particularly some of the more recent discussion that challenges the earlier rigid dichotomy between "religious" and "secular." Seen through the lens of secularity, the collective work of many of the nineteenth-century transcendentalists did the following: participated in the Enlightenment debates about religious authority and scientific discovery, paralleled early and mid-nineteenth-century European arguments about the place of religion in the modern age, and anticipated some of the modernist turns at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the same time, much as the transcendentalists undermined the lingering supernaturalism of liberal Christianity, so a few transcendentalists (and more of their followers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries) pushed back on the anthropocentrism of the transcendentalist mainstream, suggesting, as did Thoreau, that "the human" need not be at the center of a meaning-filled existence.

My effort here and in the chapters that follow is to locate nineteenth-century American transcendentalism in an unfolding set of ideas and practices that preceded and followed it. This approach challenges the understanding of many of the nineteenth-century transcendentalists themselves, who claimed that they were living in an unprecedented, epoch-making moment. "It is the mission of this Age . . . to reproduce Perfect Men," Bronson Alcott wrote in 1836. "The faded Image of Humanity is to be restored, and man reappear in his original brightness. . . . The Divine Idea of a Man is to be formed in the common consciousness of this age, and genius mould all its products in accordance with it."[4] This utopian gesture reappeared in the transcendentalist communities of Fruitlands and Brook Farm, which sought, however futilely, to create material circumstances for human flourishing in what their founders thought were ecologically friendly practices.

Rather than confirming the transcendentalists in regard to their sense of mission and destiny, this study shows transcendentalism in the United States as part of a long argument about the place of the human in the cosmos (or creation, or universe, all the terms being ideologically freighted), and further shows that transcendentalism has been influential upon that same discussion/debate moving forward into our own time. In this way, I am indebted to the recent work by Charles Taylor, Thomas Pfau, and Brad Gregory. Each has reminded readers of the need to locate what appear to be distinctly modern and contemporary practices in the *longue durée*. The durée in this book is not nearly as

long as that traced in their volumes, and I do not agree with all their claims and perspectives. But each has emphasized the legitimacy, persistence, and (sometimes concealed) influence of much older ideas and practices in the recent and present moments.[5]

One such set of ideas and practices orbits around the secular/religious pairing and informs my understanding of transcendentalism and its influence, namely, that the secular is inextricable from the religious, and that secularity is not identical with atheism. Rather, what has been true over many centuries in the Western world was also true of the relatively small and brief experiment of historical American transcendentalism, that these two worldviews have been dialectically interwoven. This dialectic within transcendentalism was omnipresent, influenced most of its major writings and activities, and led both to its impressive creativity and to its occasional intellectual incoherence. But transcendentalism was never only or even primarily a unified and coherent philosophical system in its peak years, nor has it been so in its long afterlife in American culture. Rather, it has been a practice, a discipline, and an orientation in the world. It matters little in this book's argument whether the transcendentalists were "right" or "wrong" about the nature of humanity and the divine, or about the best ways to fix a broken world, or even whether they were consistent in the responses they gave to these profound issues and questions. What matters more is that they grasped the world as it was given to them, gave shape (literarily, behaviorally, institutionally) to what they saw, and acted on what they saw and felt. Again, though transcendentalists often wrote, spoke, and acted in the framework of religious discourse and understanding, it is nonetheless important to remember that they were using such language in ways that were remarkably different both from the usages of their fellow nineteenth-century Americans and from the inherited meanings of religious tradition, in this case that of Western Christianity. This sense of religious language used and intended differently from established usage and intent makes the transcendentalists part of the broad secular turn in Western culture and informs much of the thinking and practice of people I see as their successors.

Recounting the rise and spread of religious expression in the first decades of the nineteenth century in the United States is well beyond the scope here, except to gesture at its stunning diversity. Such diversity would need to include, but is far from limited to: the new nation's evangelical and revivalist elements, including frontier camp meetings; the founding of new sects and denominations and the conflicts among existing ones; the continuation of orthodox Protestant theology in the work of the "New Divinity" heirs of Jonathan Edwards; the spread of Christianity among African slaves and the resulting hybrid of their recollected practices and Christian beliefs; the growth of historic branches of Christianity

fostered by waves of immigrants including German and Scandinavian Lutherans and German and Irish Catholics; the efflorescence of new religious bodies like Seventh-Day Adventism and Mormonism; and the humanitarian and educational reform movements that followed in the wake of these religious upheavals. Each of these versions of Christianity and others that operated at the margins of acceptability structured their communities differently, appealed to the genders differently, practiced forms of authority differently, and adhered to scripture and practice differently, and so contributed to the variety of truth-claims and forms of community that constituted religion in the early republic.[6]

In this context, it is not surprising that a tiny group of thinkers, writers, and intellectuals in New England and outposts in the upper South should once again think and express themselves differently when it came to religion, religious language, and the condition of humanity. What needs emphasizing, though, is that transcendentalism pushed beyond even the liberal edge of Protestant Christian discourse to forms of thought and expression that were post-Christian. Members of the intellectual elite in New England began absorbing very different messages about religion in general and Christianity in particular, about its historicity, and about its fate in an emergent industrial and scientific world, and shaped those messages to fit their distinctive circumstances and culture.

In calling the transcendentalist movement "secular" I put the American group in conversation (though not necessarily agreement) both with much more outspoken, antireligious and often atheist, advocates of secularism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and also with theorists of the secular from the Enlightenment into our own time, these being distinct though sometimes overlapping groups of thinkers. In his classic study of the Enlightenment in the American colonies and new nation, Henry May distinguishes between radical and moderate movements.[7] While the radical, French-influenced Enlightenment had only limited influence on American thinkers and politicians, it was difficult for educated readers to ignore the blasts of anticlerical diatribe, satire, and argument emanating from French philosophes and their political heirs before and during the French Revolution. Denis Diderot wrote, tongue in cheek, to his lover Sophie Volland in 1768 that "it is raining cannon-balls in the house of the Lord," naming several skeptical or atheist texts then in secret circulation in France. "Every day when I get up in the morning I look out of my window to see whether the great whore of Babylon is not already walking the streets with her cup in her hand and whether there are not any of the signs foretold in the firmament."[8] Voltaire's assaults against *l'infâme* that is Christianity and its belief system are familiar enough, and his argument may be summarized in Peter Gay's words: "the history of the Church is a sanguinary compilation of stupid wrangles ending in civil war and mass murder—hence the fathers of Christian-

ity, and Christians through history, are with their conduct conclusive arguments against the Christian religion. Revealed religion is an infectious disease."[9]

These views, May reminds us, were consumed, mostly in private, by only a minority of North Americans who could read French or a somewhat larger number who would have encountered them through articles in the outraged British press. Much closer to home, and in languages more could comprehend, were the works of English liberals and German practitioners of biblical criticism. These too are well-known chapters in the history of elite thought: the insistence in John Toland's 1696 treatise *Christianity Not Mysterious* that whatever is illogical cannot be true, and so religious truth can be neither mysterious nor irrational, or, in Anthony Collins's *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724), that the claim that the Hebrew Scriptures' prophecies were fulfilled in the Gospel narratives cannot be true either literally or allegorically.

For eighteenth-century North American readers, the two most unavoidable challenges to revealed religion and historic Christianity came from David Hume and Thomas Paine. Paine's *The Age of Reason* (1795) harks back to the contentious and confrontational anticlerical tradition of the French philosophes. But for the handful of readers of English philosophy, Hume's persistent skepticism was much more dangerous and difficult, in part because of his even temper and his desire to persuade his readers away from their illogical beliefs.[10] Hume's claim in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748) is that Christianity's belief system is inseparable from a belief in the historicity of miracles, which themselves cannot be proven by any rational means. That argument in turn reached back to Toland and foreshadowed the claims of German higher critics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But these criticisms only nibbled at the edge of belief for most well-read Americans in the early nineteenth century. The teachers and students who had already been exposed to, or who had already embraced, rationalist ideas about the divine and the nature of the cosmos were not overly troubled by the general sense that, on the cosmic scale, nature proceeded according to orderly and observable laws. This was the divine plan, and was separate from the more mysterious and unpredictable eruptions of grace in the lives of individual humans. Nor was a rationalist view of the natural world at odds with the widespread assumption that Scripture, particularly the New Testament, provided a trustworthy account of the life of Jesus, the reliable ground for belief in his divine status, and the map of God's plan for salvation.

Christianity, and particularly Protestant Christianity, has always claimed that God acts in human history, from divine revelation to the ancient Israelites throughout their long history, to the birth of Jesus, and onward to the founding of the church and the anticipation of the end of time and the close of history. For Catholics, the notion of sacred time reflected in the Church year of festivals

and seasons organizes life according to a different calendar, not bound to the unfolding of human history and chronology, but many Protestants have been skeptical of such separations between *kairos* and *chronos*. For them, the unfolding of the divine plan happens in the here and now, in the earthly realm and in the midst of human history. Thus, the historicity of Scripture has been a crucial element of religious faith, certainly for all Christians, but particularly in Protestant traditions. Likewise, many Protestants saw in the traditional multiple levels of biblical interpretation a distraction from its essential historicity.

Seen in this light, it is hard to overestimate the shock that greeted the work of German philologists and theologians, working in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, who applied the tools of history, linguistics, and philology to Christianity's sacred texts. This method of interpreting the Bible, known as the "higher criticism," has been the subject of much scholarship and needs little explanation here. What needs underlining, however, is the fact that the skepticism about revealed religion that the higher criticism unleashed was arguably most deeply felt and most deeply resisted by *liberal* Christians. For the majority of laypeople and clergy in early and mid-nineteenth-century America, the work of these German scholars was either of little interest or was simply a sign of those scholars' apostasy. But, for liberals, that work was intensely important and deeply problematic because it struck at the heart of their persisting belief in the special authority of the Christian message. Besides being a uniquely gifted teacher, Jesus was in a powerful sense more than that: he was a divine figure, though not, as the name "Unitarian" suggests, God. Deeply committed to an Enlightenment rationalism and equally committed to an understanding of the cosmos as law-bound, Unitarians maintained their Christian identity by claiming that the supernatural events narrated in the Gospels were historically verifiable facts.

As Elisabeth Hurth and others have ably demonstrated, the German scholars argued that the supposedly stable "life of Jesus" narratives were anything but stable, but rather were unreliable, fragmentary, and reliant on no-longer-existing proto-narratives or oral traditions. The scholarship of Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, Heinrich Paulus, and Wilhelm de Wette made it difficult enough to construct the "harmonies" of the four Gospels so beloved by Unitarian readers, but one of the most powerful challenges to the "evidentialism" (as Hurth puts it) of Unitarian theology came from David Friedrich Strauss's *Das leben Jesu* (1835–36).[11] There Strauss argued that accounts of Jesus's life, ministry, and significance come filtered through a tangled web of allusions, references, doctrinal debates, and assumptions, so much so that the historical Jesus is all but lost. Thus for Strauss the Gospel narratives were really mythic accounts, interpretations of the meaning of a figure whose historical reality is only faintly glimpsed.

Even more, what we do know of Jesus cannot bear the claim that he represents the fullest achievement of humanity. Rather, that semidivine status is reserved for humanity itself, the whole human race striving toward perfection. Strauss never denied that Jesus lived, only that the slender facts of his life cannot support the weight of the doctrine and meaning piled upon them. For Ludwig Feuerbach, whose *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (1841) first came to English readers' attention in the mid-1850s through a translation by George Eliot, the whole argument about evidence and history was beside the point. Religion was an illusion, the projection of humanity's highest wishes and aspirations onto an imagined plane of transcendence. Casting off such illusion may be difficult, Feuerbach argues, but human freedom and solidarity require abandoning such childlike dreams as religion imparts.

Thus, the historical grounding of transcendentalism is not limited to the local context of Calvinists versus Unitarians, nor does it involve a literary/philosophical response to a newly democratizing polity. Rather, transcendentalists inserted themselves into swirling transatlantic debates with enormous sociopolitical consequences. This was not merely elite argumentation. The context for historical transcendentalism includes the French Revolution and its effort in the 1790s to replace (Catholic) Christianity with a new state-sponsored faith. It also includes the growth in Europe in subsequent years of militant labor and socialist parties that labeled all state churches, Protestant or Catholic, as part of an oppressive state apparatus and embraced secularism and atheism as a result. By the 1840s, while Feuerbach expressed sympathy for the human impulse to project its own aspirations onto divine figures and narratives, Marx was arguing that religion itself is a symptom of human pathology. Far from being a sign and manifestation of human community, however misguided, religion, for Marx, was the essence of social division, encouraging people to bear what is otherwise unbearable; it was the "opiate of the people." It is possible, of course, to see Marx's analysis as rooted in one version of Christianity: its moral outrage at injustice, its sense of human alienation and separation, but also of purpose and devotion, and of a grand movement in history toward a world where injustice would be eradicated.

In the decades after transcendentalism's initial flourishing, the argument that religion was a human invention, destined to lose its influence as societies became more modern, urban, and industrial, steadily gained influence among European thinkers. Nietzsche's career-long agon with organized religion led him to assert that Judaeo-Christianity's restless search for truth, translated into a "scientific conscience," had given the deathblow to Christian dogma.[12] Near the turn of the twentieth century, French sociologist Emile Durkheim sought to describe religion as social ritual and community-affirming practice, rather than

a set of beliefs or truth-claims. In the same decades, Max Weber argued that the steady advance of scientific insights and their technological applications had rendered the natural world "disenchanted" and had locked humanity, unfortunately but necessarily, in "an iron cage" of instrumental rationalism.[13]

Durkheim and Weber are largely credited with founding the social-scientific study of religion in the twentieth century and for distinguishing between religion's social function and its extra-worldly claims without casting aspersions on the latter. But for an increasing number of twentieth-century commentators in the public sphere, including H. L. Mencken and Clarence Darrow, religion, especially Western Christianity, seemed incapable of responding to the modern world except in authoritarian or anti-intellectual ways, such as Pope Pius X's antimodernist encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907) or the fulminations of William Jennings Bryan at the Scopes trial in 1925. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, writers like Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchens have launched biting assaults on religion and religious institutions, repeating many of the same arguments from the era of Hume, Diderot, and Voltaire in the eighteenth century and Marx in the nineteenth: religion is oppressive, irrational, naïve, and hostile to science and free thought.[14] Though less confident than their nineteenth-century forebears that religion will inevitably vanish, these vigorous contemporary champions of atheism certainly hope it will be eclipsed by a thoroughly adult secularism.

If we assume that Christianity (like Judaism and Islam) involves beliefs in a transcendent divinity and in the providential involvement of that divinity in the material (including human) world, then we may acknowledge, with sociologists of religion like Steve Bruce, that religion understood this way has receded in its explanatory force and cultural influence in several Western societies over the past two centuries. Bruce frames his definition of "secularization" this way: it is "a social condition manifest in . . . the declining importance of religion for the operation of non-religious roles and institutions such as those of the state and the economy; . . . a decline in the social standing of religious roles and institutions; and . . . a decline in the extent to which people engage in religious practices, display beliefs of a religious kind, and conduct other aspects of their lives in a manner informed by such beliefs."[15] When seen as accompanying consumer-driven capitalism, burgeoning bureaucracies, state-supported (or sanctioned) education, and popular entertainment, secularization in the West appears as both global and irresistible.[16] Indeed, secularization seems so pervasive a process that it assumed, among mid-twentieth-century sociologists, the same kind of inevitability that it had among its most ardent defenders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These commentators assumed that the European experience of decline of institutional membership and individual religious practice is

the modern norm, as Jose Casanova notes.[17] As modernizing goes forward, religion becomes privatized and largely powerless to affect the large institutions and public culture of modern societies.[18]

More recently, however, sociologists and philosophers of religion have pointed out the difference between a description of a process that happened in some regions (though with great variety) and a prediction that this process will happen whenever and wherever modernization takes hold. Is secularization the inevitable consequence of modernization and will religion inevitably become a private and subjective set of experiences, embraced by a shrinking number of people? Is this in fact the case in modernizing Islamic societies in the Middle East, or in Singapore, or indeed in the United States, with its vigorous religious communities coexisting, sometimes uneasily, with its public educational systems, its vast entertainment industry, and its relentlessly modernizing economy? If religion has become increasingly privatized, how might we explain the Polish Solidarity movement, inspired by Pope John Paul II, or the influence of liberation theology in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, or the alliance of evangelical Protestantism and conservative politics in the United States? Pecora, Casanova, and others have been in the forefront of calling for a more critical theory of secularization, challenging the ready dichotomy between "religious" and "secular," and countering the claim of secularization's inevitability with more complex and historically informed accounts. A more nuanced way of understanding the interplay of religion and the secular allows us to see how American transcendentalists could continue to employ religiously freighted language and references while using that language to point to meanings very different from prior intentions or meanings, and so open up the possibility that one can inhabit several worlds of reference at once.

First, however, we need a better understanding of how the sacred and the secular are dynamically interwoven rather than always opposed.[19] Opposed to naïve Enlightenment and post-Hegelian notions of irresistible progress and deeply affected by the crisis of modernity posed by twentieth-century global catastrophes, Karl Löwith argued in *Meaning in History* (1949) that secular notions of change and development are inextricably indebted to Judaeo-Christian notions of fulfillment and salvation. The only way for modern thinkers to break free of the grip of the transcendent is to return to classical stoicism and imagine history as circular movement without progress.[20] Hans Blumenberg agreed that modernity inherits its notion of progress from Christianity. Still, "what mainly occurred in the process that is interpreted as secularization . . . should be described not as the *transposition* of authentically theological contents into secularized alienation from their origin but rather as the *reoccupation* of answer positions that had become vacant and whose corresponding questions could not be

eliminated," he wrote in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966). Pecora rephrases Blumenberg's insight this way: "modern thought is thus not simply a secularized repetition of an earlier *content*, in which philosophical or historical understanding would be nothing more than a watered-down version of the substance of no-longer-acknowledged Christian belief," but offers distinctively new answers to the questions posed by faith.[21]

In *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), his classic account of Western religion as the "carrier" of the secular, Peter Berger distinguishes more sharply between Protestant and Catholic Christianity's nascent secularity. Ancient Israel came to worship a god who was distinctly "other" than the array of many gods and intermediaries worshipped by their neighbors, a divinity who had created the cosmos but was not identical with it, a radically transcendent god. Western Christianity before the Reformation, in Berger's rapid sketch of these developments, softened that radical separation through its "modifications of transcendence," including the intercessions of saints and the Virgin Mary and the sacraments, liturgies, and rhythms of the Church calendar.[22] The effect of the Reformation, Berger goes on, was to narrow or abolish this cosmic holism by removing the intermediary structures and leaving individuals and their small circle of fellow believers largely alone before God. If Catholic Christianity is full of mediations of the sacred, employing a vast continuity between the seen and the unseen, Protestantism in this sense is a return to the utterly transcendent and distant God of ancient Judaism.

By challenging both the practices and the authority of the Church, Protestant reformers intended to purify the faith and, for some, to return Christianity to its first-century origins. The result, however, as Brad Gregory has recently shown, was often the opposite: endless doctrinal disputes, the spread of what he calls "hyperpluralism," the growth of state-sponsored churches, and years of devastating religious warfare.[23] Just as crucial for transcendentalism's secularity is the complicated link between Protestantism, especially in northern and western Europe, the British Isles, and eventually North America, and the prosperity that came with market (and, later, industrial) capitalism. It became possible for Euro-American people, mostly men, to behave in ways that made sense from a rational business point of view but that might not have aligned with their religious values, particularly those that insisted on charity and regard for the poor. In another way, it gradually became possible to imagine a God who is indistinguishable from the predictable and useful functioning of the natural world, rather than as a Providential deity who intervenes in nature as well as in history in decisive ways but who is otherwise mysterious and unknowable to human rationality.

Useful as these perspectives are, the present work relies particularly (though not uncritically) on the exposition of secularity offered by philosopher Charles

Taylor. In *A Secular Age* (2007), Taylor provides a long, compelling, and sometimes controversial account of the slow rise of secular thought and behavior in the West from the medieval centuries to the present. Like other thinkers who reject the notion that secularization and the demise of religion are inevitable and invariable, Taylor is useful in understanding American transcendentalism and its secular turn. Taylor in particular adds to this way of thinking by pointing out that "secularity" means several things. It may mean the emptying out of the public sphere of mention of God or any ultimate reality. It may mean the falling off of collective and personal religious belief and practice. It may also mean the ways in which religion becomes one option among many for finding meaning in life. This third possibility is what intrigues Taylor most. It informs his overall argument that secularity has arisen from within religious life and tradition, and is not, as he emphasizes, a "default" position assumed whenever religion is subtracted.

For Taylor, the most important element in understanding the unfolding of a secular worldview is experiential, and his book is an audacious attempt to get inside the shared religious experience both of ordinary people and of opinion-shapers. Taylor acknowledges all the varieties of regional religious expression and the periodic outbursts of doctrinal (and religio-political) disputes. Nonetheless, he proposes that in 1500 the cultural norm in Western societies was that of a coherent cosmos, where ordinary life, participation in the community, adherence to a social hierarchy, acknowledgment of an invisible realm, and belief in an all-powerful God all worked together to offer meaning and order. Nature and society were mutually reflective mirrors of divine order. The human drama unfolded within a meaningful cosmos. Nature was, further, filled with spirits, angels, demons, and possessed people, and the self was porous to enchantments that were not figments of the imagination but proceeded from actual entities. "Disbelief is hard in the enchanted world," Taylor writes. "God figures in this world as the dominant spirit, and moreover, as the only thing that guarantees that in this awe-inspiring and frightening field of forces, good will triumph."[24]

While these interlocking understandings may have formed the substrate of life in late-medieval Europe, Taylor points to dissatisfaction felt by reformers, both before and since the Protestant Reformation, with popular religious practices that flowed from this worldview. For reformers, popular religious life was disorderly, inattentive, focused on objects and relics, and lacking in personal piety and good behavior. Reformers' sense that religious life needed to be more disciplined and less reliant on "magic" paralleled an effort, especially in northern and western Europe, to bring order and discipline to society as a whole. The discipline required by an emergent market capitalism, in Weber's well-known formulation, was underscored by reformers' efforts to discipline the sinful masses. "A humourless determination to castigate sin and disorder takes over,"

Taylor writes, "a denial of ambiguity and complexity in an unmixed condemnation, which reflects the attempts by controlling élites to abolish carnivalesque and ludic practices, on the grounds that they sew [*sic*] disorder, mix pagan and Christian elements, and are a breeding ground of vice."[25]

Gradually, but with increasing speed in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, this enlarged emphasis on discipline and order both in society and in religion leads, among prosperous elites, away from the belief that God is immediately involved in human life, intervening in human history, to the notion of God as architect of a universe functioning according to unchanging laws. Again, Taylor acknowledges that this is a familiar story: the rise of scientific rational thinking, the focus on religion as a set of moral principles, the shift away from a reliance on sacred history and sacred time and toward an assumption that all time is homogenous, worldly, and predictable. Simultaneously we see a new sense of self among prosperous elites, what he calls "the buffered self," as opposed to the "porous self" of previous eras. Buffered selves are protected, insulated, less emotionally contiguous with other selves, and less given to outbursts of emotion.

On the eve of the emergence of American transcendentalism, prosperous elites had begun to embrace views of the self that were rational, orderly, disciplined, focused on morality and good behavior, attuned, in Taylor's phrase, to "human flourishing." In his account, liberal religious outlooks like Deism and Unitarianism were "modern humanisms . . . [that drew] on the forms of Christian faith they emerged from [but now emphasizing] active re-ordering; instrumental rationality; universalism; benevolence. But of course, their aim was also to reject the Christian aspiration to transcend flourishing." Many Unitarians in England and North America, for example, upheld the model of Jesus as the most perfect example of God's intention for humanity, but could not see him as in any sense divine, since that would distort the "self-contained impersonal order which God in his wisdom has set up." The result is an emphasis on human happiness, prosperity, and self-fulfillment which arose not in opposition to religious language or belief but from within it, from efforts to reform what some believed were excesses or abuses or misunderstandings of religious truth. Nonetheless, Taylor highlights the distinction between religion as an experience of the transcendent on the one hand, and the "immanent frame" of human flourishing on the other. Then, in yet another stage, comes the reaction he calls the "nova," a decided pushback against reformist hyper-control in several contexts: in romantic aesthetics, in personal and social behavior, in evangelical and charismatic religious practices. All of these, Taylor argues, de-institutionalize the language and experience of the transcendent and scatter it among several forms, in an explosion of "more than" experiences.[26]

A Secular Age has prompted a wide-ranging response from philosophers, sociologists of religion, historians, literary critics, theologians, and cultural commentators.[27] Though it appeared four years before *A Secular Age*, Christian Smith's edited collection *The Secular Revolution* represents one kind of criticism from a sociological perspective. According to Smith himself, accounts (like Taylor's) of the western European worldview in 1500 amount to a "template for pristine and robust religious life, against which all else then fails to measure up." He goes on to quote David Martin, who calls this sort of account a "fairy tale story" that cherry-picks certain elements of medieval Catholicism and equates them with religion in general, from which any departure automatically looks like secularization.[28]

Historians have also dissented from the high level of generalization at work in Taylor's book, and, as have sociologists, discerned more variation in late medieval religious beliefs and practices than Taylor presents. Even before the appearance of Taylor's study, historians were responding to any monolithic view of religion in medieval Europe by observing, again to quote Martin, that "low practice, ignorance of religion, hostility to religious institutions and personnel, indifference and even skepticism, may be located in many of the pre-modern societies of Christendom."[29] To these criticisms might be added the observation that the general claims in *A Secular Age*, especially in the opening chapters, seem at odds with Taylor's desire to write about the actual *experience* of people undergoing shifts in belief and practice. Some of this may arise from Taylor's agenda as a philosopher to lay out patterns of thought and behavior, leaving it for others to accept and fill in or reject and look elsewhere. The fact that his philosophical account is rooted in the historical record makes the book challenging to those who seek to work in more fine-grained fashion rather than on the sweeping level of Taylor's speculative account.

Nonetheless, Taylor asks important questions about what constitutes the cultural "ground," the often not-quite-articulated but nonetheless shaping assumptions that anchor individual and collective practices and beliefs, recognizing at the same time the enormous variation in those practices and beliefs. What he seeks to show, and what is most relevant for this discussion of American transcendentalism, are the various ways that a human-oriented worldview, what he calls the "immanent frame," emerges from and borrows from a view that proposes, ultimately, an extra-human-oriented view, a "transcendent frame."

What happens when we take Taylor's and others' insights about the secular turn and apply them to American transcendentalism? Taylor's narrative reinforces the conventional view of transcendentalist romanticism challenging late-Enlightenment Unitarianism, a view nuanced by scholars who show that the conflict is more family quarrel than outright warfare.[30] Still, quarrels have

consequences, and some of the most important ones that centered first around George Ripley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Theodore Parker and their followers had to do on one level with beliefs and belief systems. These figures were laying hands on two of the key claims of Western Christianity: the historicity of the events on which the Christian faith was founded, and the existence of a divine being who intervened in that history in distinctive and life-changing ways.

American, and particularly New England, clergy and other intellectuals were exposed to the critical claims of German higher criticism and many others in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Besides the German theologians, Americans were reading or reading about Swedish geologist and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), who had shaped a complicated cosmic system of correspondences, an intricate ladder of visible and invisible entities. Swedenborg's concepts became available to North American readers through Boston druggist Sampson Reed's *Observations on the Growth of the Mind* (1826). Initially influential, Swedenborgianism proposed that nature was structured like a language, one that found its echo in the very arrangement and function of the human mind. So, humanity could find within a new intimacy with nature that might overcome the dualism and materialism that the scientific revolution and Enlightenment thinking had instigated. Another even more powerful influence came from the work of James Marsh, president of the University of Vermont, who published a "Preliminary Essay" together with his edition of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1829). For American audiences, these works were the first glimpse of Coleridge's crucial distinction between "Understanding" and "Reason," terms Coleridge thought he had adapted from German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Coleridge, as is now widely believed, probably misunderstood Kant's distinction, but his was a fruitful mistake, since it provided American readers a vocabulary for grasping the difference between apprehending a truth by recourse to logic, history, or sensation, what Coleridge called "Understanding," and grasping a truth through "Reason," that is, intuition, insight, and imagination. "[L]et me ask you do you draw the distinction of Milton Coleridge & the Germans between Reason & Understanding," Emerson wrote his brother Edward in 1834. "I think it a philosophy itself. & like all truth very practical."[31] Young teacher and intellectual Elizabeth Palmer Peabody introduced readers of the Unitarian journal the *Christian Examiner* to another of Marsh's contributions to intellectual ferment, his translation of Johann Gottfried von Herder's *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* (1782), in a series of review essays she wrote in 1834.[32] For Herder, biblical stories were not to be understood as verifiable statements of fact but rather as poetic narratives appealing to the imagination of the hearer and, later, the reader. Andrews Norton, champion of Unitarian rationalism, fierce opponent of German intellectual influences, and unofficial censor of the *Christian*

Examiner, was so outraged by Peabody's essays that he refused to sanction the appearance of the last three of Peabody's projected six-part series, since she "must needs be incompetent to the subject from want of learning," as she put it sardonically to Orestes Brownson.[33] Meanwhile, another stream of influence emerged from Scots writer Thomas Carlyle's essays on German literature and philosophy in the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Foreign Review*, with their passionate defenses of the work of Herder, Fichte, Goethe, Richter, and Novalis and slashing attacks on the West's cultural dullness and descent into materialism.

All these texts and the discussions around them stirred controversy, especially among young people who felt constrained by the combination of New England social propriety and Unitarian rationalism. But the influence of ideas from abroad, combined with democratic winds blowing even in Federalist and Whig New England, were felt most decisively with a series of publications and addresses from people now being labeled "transcendentalists." In his 1836 review of English Unitarian James Martineau's *The Rationale of Religious Enquiry*, Unitarian clergyman George Ripley acknowledged the factuality of Jesus's miracles, but denied that sincere faith had to be built on such a claim: "If, then, a firm faith in Christianity may be cherished independently of miracles; if the purpose of miracles be to operate within the sphere of action rather than of thought; and if there be great difficulties in the proof of miracles, without a previous conviction of the divine authority of him who is said to exhibit them, we hold it to be an unsound method to make a belief in them the essential foundation of Christian faith, or the ultimate test of Christian character."[34]

Firing back a response days later, not in the pages of the *Christian Examiner* but in the newspaper the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Norton, who had already put down the learned Elizabeth Peabody for her lack of education, similarly dismissed Ripley's argument by saying that "he who controverts doctrines . . . should satisfy himself that he has ability to discuss the subject."[35] Undaunted by Norton's position as the Harvard Divinity School's Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature, Ripley made absolutely clear the differences between them, which

> arise from a radical difference in our philosophical views. You are a disciple of the school which was founded by Locke—the successor of Hobbes and the precursor of Condillac and Voltaire. For that philosophy I have no respect. I believe it to be superficial, irreligious and false in its primary elements. The evils it has brought upon humanity, by denying to the mind the power of perceiving spiritual truth, are great and lamentable. . . . I wish to go back to the philosophy of the most enlightened Fathers, to that of the giants of English theology in the days of their unshorn strength, to that lofty spiritual faith which is now held by the most eminent philosophers of the continent of Europe.[36]

These "eminent philosophers" in Ripley's mind likely included the same advocates of the higher criticism whom Norton so despised.

The publication of Emerson's *Nature*, likewise in 1836, prompted even more controversy, again simultaneously theoretical and personal. In his review of Emerson's book in the *Christian Examiner*, Harvard professor Francis Bowen criticized it as sloppy in logic, ill-considered in its claims, and "sometimes coarse and blunt" in its rhetoric. In the second section of his review, Bowen extends his criticism to the entire movement, calling it "abstruse in its dogmas, fantastic in its dress, and foreign in its origin. It comes from Germany, and is one of the first fruits of a diseased admiration of every thing from that source, which has been rapidly gaining ground of late, till in many individuals it amounts to sheer midsummer madness."[37]

As an intellectual movement, transcendentalism thus far made use of the higher criticism in Ripley's and Peabody's questioning of the historical accuracy of biblical narratives, blending it with claims derived from Kant, Herder, and Coleridge, through Marsh and others, that the deepest insights into nature and human experience come not primarily from the testimony of experts or even from sense impressions, but from individual intuition and imagination. But no document would be more decisive in cementing transcendentalism's reputation as dangerously irreligious, even socially damaging, as Emerson's 1838 "Divinity School Address."

Speaking at their invitation to a group of graduating students from Harvard Divinity School, Emerson denounced the contemporary Christian church, in which his listeners would soon assume leadership roles, as a cult, a "Mythus"—with Emerson adopting, whether intentionally or not, the language of David Friedrich Strauss. For Emerson, Jesus "felt that man's life was a miracle, and all that man doth, and he knew that this daily miracle shines, as the man is diviner." Thus the life and witness of Jesus were hugely influential, but not unique. He is not, as the church has historically taught, a salvific figure. Rather, "thus by his holy thoughts, Jesus serves us, and thus only."[38] Though he would soon abandon his transcendentalism, Orestes Brownson was quick to see the political and social dimensions of Emerson's address, especially the radical self-reliance and democratic egalitarianism of its claims: "his object is to make men scorn to be slaves to routine, to custom, to established creeds, to public opinion, to the great names of this age, of this country, or of any other."[39]

Fresh from his controversy with George Ripley, Norton linked Emerson with "the atheist Shelley," the "hyper-Germanized Englishman, Carlyle," and "the German pantheist, Schleiermacher." For Norton, the keyword comes in the title of his summary dismissal of transcendentalism, "A Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity" (1839): "there are many who avow their disbelief of all

that is miraculous in Christianity, and still affect to call themselves Christians. But Christianity was a revelation from God; and, in being so, it was itself a miracle. . . . Nothing is left that can be called Christianity, if its miraculous character be denied. Its essence is gone; its evidence is annihilated. Its truths, involving the highest interests of man, the facts which it makes known, and which are implied in its very existence as a divine revelation, rest no longer on the authority of God." What is offered in the place of faith based on verifiable evidence are "undefined and unintelligible feelings, having reference perhaps to certain imaginations, the result of impressions communicated in childhood, or produced by the visible signs of religious belief existing around us, or awakened by the beautiful and magnificent spectacles which nature presents. . . . In this case, whatever feelings may exist, they can have no claim to be called religious."[40]

In this view, claims to religious truth based on intuition constitute infidelity, the absence of faithfulness. Called upon to buttress their erstwhile Unitarian enemies, Calvinist theologians J. W. Alexander, Albert Dod, and Charles Hodge from Princeton Theological Seminary mounted their own assault on a German-inspired transcendentalism they had no difficulty calling "infidel": "In place of the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God to whom his people, in all ages, have fled for refuge . . . we are presented with a vague personification of abstract principles, with a God who . . . returns to himself in the consciousness of man. . . . This necessary transfusion of God into the universe destroys our very idea of God."[41] Even this temporary alliance of liberal and orthodox did little to allay the fear of many Unitarians that transcendentalist secularity would make their entire liberal agenda suspect, as indeed was the claim of Reformed clergyman Theodore Frelinghuysen: "There is not a Unitarian church in the country, in which you will not find a Bible on the desk, in which they do not read from its pages, in which they do not speak of God and of virtue with reverence and admiration; yet when questioned as to what they believe, you find that *they believe in nothing essential to Christianity*."[42]

Sitting in the audience that July day in 1838, listening to Emerson read his "Divinity School Address," had been young Unitarian clergyman Theodore Parker. Parker was one of the most prodigiously learned figures in the transcendentalist circle, fluent in ancient and modern languages, a voracious reader, and an implacable combatant in words and ideas. In May 1841, Parker was invited to preach at the ordination of Charles Shackford at the Hawes Place Church in South Boston. Parker titled his sermon "A Discourse of the Transient and Permanent in Christianity," his translation of the title of an 1838 essay by none other than David Friedrich Strauss. Praising Jesus's message as clear, simple, self-evident, and eternal, Parker saved his invective for the institution and practices that followed in the wake of the itinerant teacher's brief life: "the notions men form about

the origin and nature of the scriptures, respecting the nature and authority of Christ, have nothing to do with Christianity except as its aids or its adversaries; they are not the foundation of its truths. These are theological questions, not religious questions. Their connection with Christianity appears accidental; for if Jesus had taught at Athens, and not at Jerusalem; if he had wrought no miracle, and none but the human nature had ever been ascribed to him; if the Old Testament had forever perished at his birth,—Christianity would still have been the Word of God; it would have lost none of its truths." For Parker, the essence of Christianity is "absolute, pure morality; absolute, pure religion; the love of man; the love of God acting without let or hindrance."[43]

Response to Parker's sermon was swift: both Trinitarian and Unitarian writers weighed in against his wholesale dismissal of Christian tradition, and by the following year only eight Unitarian clergy were willing to exchange pulpits with him. Parker's sermons expanding his thesis in "Transient and Permanent" were published as *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* in 1842, widening the breach between the disputant and his fellow clergy. At a conference in January 1843, Parker was invited to withdraw from the Boston Association of Ministers, but refused. "In the end," as Barbara Packer puts it, "Parker refused to be silenced or ousted from the church. He finally published his massive edition of De Wette's *Introduction to the Old Testament* in 1843 and then left for a tour of Europe made necessary by the cumulative exhaustion of the preceding years."[44]

Examined close up, as William Hutchison does in *The Transcendentalist Ministers*, we can see the intimacy of these controversies: Ripley's revulsion at Norton's appeal to institutional and individual authority, Emerson's surprise at the firestorm his 1838 address ignited, Parker's insistence that he still be considered a member of the Unitarian clergy despite his virtual excommunication by his peers.[45] Seen from a little further away, we can observe how sensitive all these transcendentalist leaders were to charges of skepticism, infidelity, and atheism, the same charges leveled against German higher critics. We may even sympathize with the conclusion of leaders like Norton and Bowen that, taken collectively, transcendentalist claims about the truth of Scripture and the unique role of Jesus had the effect of moving liberal religion beyond anything that could in their estimation be called Christian.

The transcendentalists' one-time ally Orestes Brownson thought he understood the secular implications of transcendentalism very clearly. His defense of Emerson in 1838 against Norton's strictures extolled freedom of thought and expression, but, by the mid-1840s, as he embraced Roman Catholicism, Brownson saw transcendentalism in a new light. He now saw the long reformist arc that began before the Protestant Reformation leading, in its liberal direction, toward the deinstitutionalizing of the church, infrequency in observance of the sacra-

ments, and a de-emphasis of grace, concomitant with a heightened emphasis on ethical behavior, social responsibility, and moral decency. For Brownson, this is the ultimate dismantling of a worldview that orbits around a transhuman divine being and realm, and the triumph of one that is oriented around the human. In his long three-part response to Parker's *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion*, which he describes as "crude, confused; without method, order, systematic unity, or scientific development," Brownson argues that for transcendentalists "the appeal is always made to the individual reason, conscience, and sentiment. In the individual is the authority before which all must bow, the tribunal before which all claimants must plead." All tradition, scripture, doctrine, and church history may be judged imperfect by an insightful self: "Their leading doctrine is, that each man may and should be a Christ, and speak from his own proper divinity."[46] Thus, "Protestantism Ends in Transcendentalism," as Brownson put it in the title of one of his essays. "Transcendentalism," he warns there, "is the last stage this side of *nowhere*; and when reached, we must hold up, or fly off into boundless vacuity."[47]

When transcendentalists argued with their Unitarian siblings about miracles and the sources of religious authority, lent support to the embattled Theodore Parker, abstained from receiving the sacraments or signed off from attending services altogether, disdained church history and traditions, or preferred the role models of classical figures, they were engaging in much more than local disagreement. The larger context was that of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment critiques of revealed religion as irrational, outmoded, superstitious, and oppressive, or else, as Feuerbach and Friedrich Schleiermacher argued, a projection of human need and aspiration. It was never a mere family quarrel—but it was a debate to cut through families. It was deeply on the minds of many American readers like Mary Moody Emerson, whose nephew William Emerson had studied the German theologians while in Göttingen and had absorbed much more than she liked of their methods and spirit. To William's brother Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mary Emerson wrote,

> let us not complain of calvinism—its' most terrible points are better than nothing. If the bible is a fable I would cherish it now in age with undying zeal— It may have a truth of infinite weight like other fables wh have a little. But it is not a fable I know[.] It answers to the living consciousness of Gods impress on the soul. It develops the divinity within. Not the poetic *gospelless* divinity of German idealism—whose baseless fabrick will vanish into thin pestiferous air. . . . Wm has obliged me by his frankness—he attaches no infamy to his situation—thinks Humes argument against miracles never answered.[48]

It was not simply William Emerson's embrace of Hume that so agitated Mary. It was, rather, what appeared to be a wholesale assault by advocates of the higher criticism against the very ground of Protestant Christianity, which had fused together the individual experience of conversion with the historicity of the biblical narrative. Without that unity of inward experience with outward fact, we are left, as she writes, with simply a "gospelless divinity of German idealism."

Transcendentalism can look like a quarrel among the literati, an exchange of elevated discourse appealing mostly to those with a taste for theological and philosophical dispute. It might be seen as a *trahison des clercs*, with its educated youth betraying the hard-won liberal achievements secured by their professors and elders. Certainly, transcendentalist intellectuals challenged the cultural authority of the clergy and the professoriat, substituting individual agents as cultural arbiters of meaning, humanizing the overarching Christian narrative, or even setting it aside altogether. This is why Norton, Bowen, Alexander, Dod, Hodge, and others reacted so strongly to Ripley on the subject of miracles, to Emerson's "Divinity School Address," and to Parker's sermons and tracts. Surely it was, as Christian Smith would say, a struggle for power, a local response to the undermining of their authority as interpreters of sacred texts and guides to social and personal behavior. Even more, as Norton and the others understood, while transcendentalists would still gesture toward divinity, the link between male-centered authority and divine sanction was broken, and all of its adherents, and particularly the women in the movement, would find that dissolution liberating.

But transcendentalism should not be understood primarily as the work of a few dissident intellectuals. Rather, everywhere one turns during transcendentalism's nineteenth-century heyday, from the 1830s to 1860s, we see a rush of individual and social experiments. Transcendentalism was never simply the background music for the work of a few distinctive individuals, but a swirling and often chaotic workshop of intensely active and reflective people, some noteworthy, some barely remembered. What bound these people together, mostly in New England, with a few in the upper South, was a democratic commitment to the integrity of individual persons, a sense that the deepest truths come first from intuition and imagination, and a sense that nature and humanity each belong to a shared cosmos and are deeply interactive. Nearly all from Unitarian backgrounds, transcendentalists comfortably used Christian language metaphorically, but their orientation was always toward this world, and manifestations of "spirit" were always located in dimensions of human experience. Further, transcendentalists shared a restless experimentalism, a willingness to build and take down, an aversion to fixity.

What, exactly, was that collective effort, that transcendentalist "practice"? What did it constitute, taken "ensemble," as Whitman might say? For some, like Elizabeth Peabody and Bronson Alcott, transcendentalism prompted efforts at educational reform that emphasized building on students' native insights rather than simply filling them with facts. Peabody's and Alcott's short-lived but memorable Temple School was the result, as was Peabody's signature arena of postwar reform, the American kindergarten movement. Similarly, Peabody, Alcott, and Margaret Fuller all conducted guided conversations in which participants (for Peabody and Fuller, principally women) were encouraged to be self-expressive. Conversation was also the purpose of the Transcendental Club, a group of clergy and others who gathered periodically in the homes of its participants to engage with the new thinking that had emerged from Europe and the British Isles and the intellectual ferment it was causing in New England. From the Transcendental Club came the impetus for a transcendentalist-oriented journal, the *Dial*, edited at various times by Fuller and Emerson. Transcendentalism also provided the basis for the formation of intentional communities like Alcott's Fruitlands and George and Sophia Ripley's Brook Farm, although the latter eventually turned toward the more hyper-organized structure proposed by French theorist Charles Fourier. Transcendentalism was at the core of Peabody's West Street Bookshop, where Bostonians could find international publications supportive of liberal thinking. Transcendentalism's insistence on the integrity of individuals drove many of its adherents into the antislavery and abolitionist movements in the 1850s and prompted Thoreau to call militant abolitionist John Brown "a transcendentalist above all."[49]

Transcendentalism might be seen as a kind of interdisciplinary study group, except for the fact that its adherents lived before our contemporary notions or practice of "the disciplines." There was, indeed, a constant interweaving of concerns as well as a constant passage among different forms of expression, including poems, essays, reviews, letters, journals, and the frequent exchanges of ideas that took place during the long walks and talks that were integral to the community of the transcendentalists. The documents and accounts we have from them reveal the seamless, nested interconnection of their lives, their art, and their politics, and their restless, ceaseless innovations in all these arenas. In estimating what was influential about the transcendentalists for future generations, I stress the interactive nature of the movement, its evolving, experimental quality.

The metaphors we choose to describe transcendentalism help shape our view of the movement and its consequences. Together with the commonly invoked "circle," the "network" trope conveys something of the collective experience. We might also imagine transcendentalism, seen not through these static metaphors but as constructed in time, as a form of the old practice in letter-writing

of "cross-hatching," in which, paper being dear, the initial sender wrote in one direction and then turned the page ninety degrees and wrote again, across and through the text, with the first recipient then writing in the margins and sending the pages on, each correspondent, whatever their number, both preserving and altering the document as it passed through many hands.

To call transcendentalism "experimental" or even "pragmatic" focuses attention on the inventive and active nature of the movement. Recent commentators, including Richard Poirier, Cornel West, Mark Bauerlein, and Joan Richardson, have identified a pragmatic tradition in American thought and letters that starts with Emerson and moves forward to Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and Richard Rorty, among others.[50] Emerson anticipated those nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers in his resistance to claims for universal moral or religious truth that seem unconnected to actual experience or untested by that experience. William James's version of pragmatism tests the validity of an idea by its action in the world. If the idea does the work we wish it to do, then it becomes true for us by virtue of its consequences. "Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself."[51] Pragmatism is largely silent, according to Louis Menand, on the question of the "rightness" and appeal of ideas to begin with: "Pragmatism explains everything about ideas except why a person would be willing to die for one."[52]

Transcendentalist "pragmatism" is ceaseless experimentation *in service to* a preexisting democratic commitment to the maximum extension of human flourishing, *undergirded by* a belief in "limit experiences" that push the possibilities of being human. Here again, Charles Taylor is useful in helping us locate the peculiar quality of transcendentalism's secularity, by pointing to the impression of standing in an "open space and feel[ing] the winds pulling you now here, now there" that he finds in William James.[53] By this, Taylor points to James's sense of the experience of deeply feeling the claims of this-worldly, modern, rationalist culture and *simultaneously* deeply feeling the draw of an otherworldly, "spiritual" claim upon oneself. In this reading of transcendentalism, its practitioners and heirs stand, for the most part, in that Jamesian open space.[54]

In thinking about the ways transcendentalism is understood and appropriated by successive artists, writers, and intellectuals, I distinguish between the main current of the movement, a "dense transcendentalism," and an emergent stream I call "fluid transcendentalism." "Dense transcendentalism" is a set of practices and activities that are experimental, pragmatic, often utopian, even messianic, in their character, all of which share a common core of faith in human potential for growth, development, and self-expression, and all of which are liberated from specifically Christian narrative and core beliefs. At the same

time, some transcendentalists retained a commitment to that specifically Christian language and insisted that they were still within its capacious boundaries, or at least retained a willingness to use its language for rhetorical purposes. Here Emerson, at times, and certainly Elizabeth Peabody, both spring to mind. Others, like Fuller and Thoreau, sought other vocabularies and traditions to convey their insights. In all these examples of dense transcendentalism we see a secular turn: the challenge to a singular religious vocabulary and explanatory system; the de-divinizing of religion into a more individualized experience of the "spiritual"; most of all, a sense that the human is the measure of all things, even if the "human" is also the site of "more than" experiences and insights of ecstasy and inspiration. In this sense, Perry Miller was right in saying that transcendentalism is religious, but only if we mean "religious" by virtue of memory or imputation or nostalgia, employing a language borrowed to make a point about a wholly human experience, but nonetheless meaningful. Thus, transcendentalism "gets over" the remains of Protestant Christianity by setting it aside, although not without a backward glance.

Dense transcendentalism, in its secular, human-centered, experimental, and nested practices, is the mainstream of the movement both in its nineteenth-century heyday and in its continuing cultural influence. We see many of these practices in Charles Ives's compositions and in Joseph Cornell's collage-constructions, together with that post-Christian spiritual sense of ecstatic "more than" experiences that inspire and infuse their creative work. We see the transcendentalist utopian and messianic drive to revolutionize political institutions and social practices celebrated in Truman Nelson's novels and echoed in his polemics on racism and war. We also see his disdain for any lingering religious sensibility, as befits his Marxism, although Nelson acknowledges the once-powerful motivation for action that such a sensibility instilled in figures as diverse as communitarian Sophia Ripley and militant abolitionist John Brown.

Nineteenth-century transcendentalism is also made up of a second strand, only fleetingly visible in the antebellum decades but increasingly visible in our own time, a strand here called "fluid transcendentalism." If most nineteenth-century transcendentalists reoriented the vertical axis of faith into a horizontal axis of human-centeredness, Henry Thoreau offered a glimpse of the dissolution of even that axis. Fluid transcendentalism challenges human-centeredness itself, relocating the human in the larger context of the material world which itself is enchanted or re-enchanted, though not by an external force. This version of transcendentalism is admittedly strange and elusive, expressed sometimes in odd images and startling distortions of ordinary appearance. Fluid

transcendentalism's bodies are elongated, misshapen, missing parts, or else androgynous, even transgendered; human society and the drive for its reform recede and the magic of the material world emerges. Some examples are obvious: Emerson imagines himself a transparent eyeball; Thoreau seeks to devour a woodchuck raw and claims his kinship with vegetable matter. Other, less obvious examples also help identify this often subterranean theme: Jones Very, the mystic and apocalyptically minded Calvinist poet and essayist adopted briefly by the transcendentalists, wrote about selves as naked trees, about salvation as requiring a self-emptying. Thoreau projected a self as "A bunch of violets without their roots, / And sorrel intermixed, / Encircled by a wisp of straw / Once coiled about their shoots," a fragile bouquet of weeds rather than a coherent identity.[55]

I link this version of transcendentalism to the modern and contemporary work of Annie Dillard, Mary Oliver, and Henry Beston, and to the theoretical insights of Jane Bennett and others loosely identified as "new materialists." Tracing a genealogy of thinkers who anticipate their work, Bennett and others are interested in Thoreau because of his fascination with the power of nature beyond or besides the human, the sheer thing-ness of the material world that does not rely on the human for its existence or its justification. This is what Thoreau means by the Wild, says Bennett, "an irreducibly strange dimension of matter, an *out-side*." Bennett and others propose that the human also needs to be understood as fundamentally and complexly material from top to bottom, so to speak, not material just from the neck down with the add-on of powerful intellect or an immortal soul.[56]

This is not to argue anachronistically that Thoreau and occasionally others are new materialists *avant la lettre* in the sense that twenty-first-century thinkers are. There was still a strong residue of idealist thinking and longing in the nineteenth-century writers, a sense that nature "glows" with a meaning that is somehow imparted to it by some force not itself, the same force that "glows" within selves. That kind of generalized spirituality still privileges the human voice, intellect, or intuition to discern the spiritual kernel, rescue inert nature, and reanimate it. For proponents of fluid transcendentalism, nature does not need such human intervention. The material world simply is.

In this fluid aspect of nineteenth-century transcendentalism, the secular turn is just as evident as in the dense transcendentalism of experiment and reform. Dense transcendentalism, as I have argued, shifted away from the distinctively Christian narrative and framework and sought to rethink and re-express human life as a human project. Fluid transcendentalism pushes beyond even that human-centeredness and imagines a vitalized cosmos in which humanity has a part, but not the only part. Fluid transcendentalism is just a glimpse, one

thread in what is otherwise a sustained effort to inhabit, express, and reform a human-centered world. But what fluid transcendentalism also offers, besides a sense of the vitality of the material world, is a way to live without regretting the loss of the supernatural infusion. On occasion, the inheritors of transcendentalism seem suffused with nostalgia, a sense of what is lost, a desire to retain Christian language and references even while moving beyond them. In the twentieth century, the most obvious example of an heir of transcendentalism for whom nostalgia and the use of nostalgia lay at the core of his creative genius is Charles Ives. But Thoreau's fluid transcendentalism, like that of Annie Dillard, and, at points, of Joseph Cornell and Mary Oliver, can reach for religiously inflected language without the sense of being indebted to it or identified with it. For Thoreau, as for Cornell, Dillard, and Oliver, the material has never lost its efficacy, its "stand-alone" fascination. These artists explore the ways one might get close to, inhabit, meld with materiality itself and grasp an energy that is not simply a human projection.

Focusing on transcendentalism as a movement that spread across several different modes of activity and expression allows us to see more clearly its continuing impact on the production of culture in the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, in ways that only focusing on influential individuals may not. Antebellum transcendentalism inspired a host of creative selves as diverse as Walt Whitman, William James, theologian Samuel Johnson, and feminist Caroline Healey Dall in the nineteenth century; Charles Ives, Jane Addams, Louis Sullivan, Lewis Mumford, Henry Beston, Joseph Cornell, and Wallace Stevens in the first half of the twentieth century; and Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Truman Nelson, Annie Dillard, Mary Oliver, Wendell Berry, and Edward Hoagland in the latter half of the last century and into our own time, a few of whom are treated in these pages. What is more, transcendentalism infuses culture collectively, and we see its ongoing influence in phases of the women's movement, the civil rights movement, the antiwar movements of the 1960s and 1970s and again in the early 2000s, the antinuclear movement of the 1980s, the Occupy and Black Lives Matter movements. These figures and movements all inherit, recombine, and talk back to elements of the original movement, shaping distinctive responses to the modern and postmodern decades, marked as those decades have been by secularism, social fragmentation, industrial and urban expansion, and risks to the natural environment.

This is a very different genealogy from that which sees transcendentalism as persisting only in the forms of ineffectual liberalism and philosophical idealism, or as underwriting a capitalist culture of possessive individualism. Looked at holistically, transcendentalism is not easily categorized along a political spectrum, nor is it simply a harbinger of modernity, nor can it be dismissed as only

a nostalgic return to an idealized past. Grasping the real influence of transcendentalism on American culture means challenging those partial portraits. In its continuing emphasis on the fluidity of identity, persistence and redefinitions of spirituality, aesthetic experimentalism, and cultural critique, transcendentalism offers a model for reimagining and remaking culture.

TWO } *Transcendentalism in the Postwar Years*

From its very beginning, transcendentalism has been a contested site. What was it, and what to call it? "Transcendentalism," after Kant's transcendental philosophy? "The Newness," or "the Party of Hope," as the transcendentalists themselves suggested? A new system, or the restatement of old ideas and aspirations? Its opponent Andrews Norton called transcendentalism a "new school" populated by "silly women . . . and silly young men," and Orestes Brownson saw it as the logical consequence of Protestantism in upholding the right of private judgment.[1] Even in 1861, when red-hot abolitionists and transcendentalists like Thomas Wentworth Higginson and scions of prominent Boston families like the Shaws, all readers of Emerson's essays and the *Dial*, took up their commissions, and when transcendentalist women like Louisa May Alcott rolled bandages, held fund-raisers, and worked in hospitals, it was far from clear how much the Union's goals in the conflict mirrored transcendentalist values or abolitionist purposes. In the postwar years, transcendentalism was similarly contested. Who could best interpret it? What legacy, if any, did it leave for the next generation? Did it have a place or use in the war-altered social and cultural landscape?

The argument over the meaning and influence of transcendentalism, already raging before the Civil War, boiled up again before the war's end. A week before the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia on April 9, 1865, a national convention of Unitarian leaders meeting in New York City adopted a resolution identifying Unitarianism as a Christian denomination under the rule of the "Lord Christ" and pledging devotion to the work of "building up the kingdom." Samuel Johnson, transcendentalist, essayist, and pioneering anthropologist of religion, took to the pages of the *Radical* to denounce the silencing of all dissenting voices and the "aristocratic tone of some of the speakers."[2]

This effort to transform Unitarian Christianity into its own denomination was spearheaded by New York clergyman Henry Bellows, aided by James Freeman Clarke, often considered a companion of the transcendentalists but now persuaded to join the cause of uniformity. Bellows and his allies had become increasingly alarmed both by the continued growth of evangelical and orthodox versions of Protestant Christianity and by the growing number of young men at Harvard Divinity School and elsewhere who were attracted to the post-Christian

spirituality of transcendentalism. The head of the United States Sanitary Commission during the war, Bellows was repelled by what he took to be the anarchic individualism of transcendentalism evident already in the 1840s and early 1850s, when Theodore Parker's refusal to resign from his Unitarian affiliation had caused profound fissures in the liberal camp. In the wake of Parker's attacks on the historicity of Christianity, many seminarians before and during the war years, including Higginson, Johnson, Octavius Brooks Frothingham, David Atwood Wasson, and Francis Ellingwood Abbot, who called themselves "radicals," sought to liberate religion from its specific Christian tradition and vocabulary. Where to relocate it, whether in the experience of the individual or in the discoverable patterns of law-bound nature, would be subject to vigorous disagreement. Still, for orthodox Protestant leaders, this disaffiliation from historic Christianity was exactly what they had feared would be the result of the Unitarian revolt earlier in the century, and exactly what Bellows and Clarke wished to forestall in reshaping the Unitarian movement as a Protestant denomination.

In a series of essays in the *Radical* starting in December 1865, Johnson identified the key issue separating "denominational" Unitarians from the radicals as that of authority. As a natural and universal fact of human experience, religious consciousness must rely on the authority of the self, what Johnson thought of as a spiritual consciousness. "The representative of the Spiritual Nature in each person is the state of his religious consciousness, the condition of light or darkness, good or evil therein. It is always this, not Bible, Church, or Miracle that determines his belief. When he thinks he is judging by their authority, he is really judging by this, and *its* authority. It is idle to talk of infallible revelations, of supernatural proofs, when there stands behind all teachers, a judge within us, who decides for us what every doctrine shall mean. We rely on this authority, and cannot help it."[3] In contrast, historical Christianity stakes its claim on external authorities and core doctrines, which Johnson found to be both illogical and repulsive.[4] To Clarke's effort to smooth over the differences between the camps by arguing that everyone always at some point relies on authority (so creating an *ecclesia* should not be viewed as overly intrusive), Johnson offered a ringing rebuttal. Quoting Emerson or Parker is very different from quoting Scripture: "The radical who goes to the Bible as *a* Source of Truth . . . and the Orthodox who goes to the Bible as *the only* infallible Source of Truth, differ in this; that they aim in opposite directions, the one at free inquiry into human opinions, the other at entire submission to an unquestionable Word of God."[5] For Johnson as for the other radicals, the inward "spiritual" sense is real and authoritative, and its very existence within the self proves the existence of an immaterial, spiritual realm.[6]

It must have sounded to readers of the *Radical* and followers of this debate that transcendentalism was still a cultural resource despite the passage of time,

and indeed the "spiritual but not religious" argument of Johnson and others echoed the perspectives of Emerson and Parker. Some of the same counterthrusts against antebellum transcendentalism as humanism and covert atheism were made against the postwar figures. Norton had made common cause with Princeton's Calvinists to attack the "nonsense and impiety" in Emerson's "Divinity School Address," and now Bellows and Clarke wanted to anchor Unitarianism firmly within the Protestant Christian fold. In 1865, sometime Swedenborgian Henry James Sr. seemed to channel the Catholic Orestes Brownson in arguing against Johnson that religion is definitely *not* a human product, neither normal nor natural, but rather intended to challenge the human urge to self-love and self-regard by emphasizing the need for supernatural intervention and revelation: "religion implies a profound quarrel on God's part with human nature."[7] The following year, James sharpened his critique by assigning much of the blame for this assault on revealed religion to his friend Emerson, whom he described as a leader in "confounding spiritual and moral existence": "the law of the religious life with Mr. Emerson is not any sincere, veridical, outward Revelation, but an inward, particular intuition; not intelligence, but sentiment; not publicly authenticated truth but privately authenticated fantasy; and hence he feels himself free as no mere prosaic mind can, to magnify the Rig-Veda above the four evangelists."[8]

More than a year after the first convention of Unitarian churches, a second one on October 10 and 11, 1866, in Syracuse, New York, reaffirmed the denomination's allegiance to the "Lord Jesus Christ" and the goal of the "building up of the kingdom of His Son," despite protests of young clergymen and other dissenters.[9] The *Radical*'s assistant editor, Joseph Marvin, argued that "Unitarianism is notoriously on the side of reaction," and the time had come for independence.[10] A group of radical men and women gathered in early February 1867 at the Boston home of Cyrus Bartol to explore the possibility of a new organization devoted to "free religion," now that the Unitarian establishment had insisted upon its identity as a Christian denomination.[11] Some at the meeting felt that more organization would replicate the problem posed by the establishment's move, while others felt that establishing some structure would advance the values they held in common. Eventually, a consensus was reached and the call went out for a public discussion of the prospects of "Free Religion in America." Signed by Frothingham, Abbot, John Weiss, Edward Towne, and William Potter, the call to form the Free Religious Association expressed the intent to "make a fellowship, not a party; to promote the scientific study of religious truth, not to defend the legacy of theological tradition; to keep open the lines of spiritual freedom, not to close the lines of speculative belief."[12] The advertisement for this meeting announced that several prominent figures from the transcendentalist and re-

form movements had been invited and "addresses may be expected from most of them," including Emerson, Lucretia Mott, Robert Dale Owen, Higginson, and Wasson, among others.

Even at this inaugural meeting at Boston's Horticultural Hall in May 1867, whose attendees filled the hall to capacity, the dissensus among speakers showed that creating an organization that was opposed to organization was a difficult contradiction from the outset. It had not "been anticipated that the speakers would find as much to criticize in one another as in the established denominations," Stow Persons observes accurately.[13] Frothingham put it this way: "There was too much criticism, and it was not always just. There was too much speculation, and it was not always wise. The plan of letting each sect tell its own story was a little confusing at the start."[14] Free religion advocates were often better at saying what they were against than what they were for, unsparing in their dissection of the unbelievable and debasing doctrines of Christian orthodoxy, and far less successful in saying what should be worshipped or followed.[15] Of particular interest—and a source of dismay for many—were the claims of Abbot and his allies, who insisted that the new movement not be understood as in any sense Christian but rather as a rationalist and scientific effort to articulate humanity's common moral principles. In the same vein, George Stearns argued that "religion is semi-fallacious, a fabrication of fancy concerning the unfathomed destiny of man; being born of, and subsisting upon, the primal weakness of reason."[16] Founding the *Index* in 1870 to forward his views, Abbot argued that all truth-claims needed to rely on universally accepted principles of rationality, and found appeals to individual intuition antiquated and socially irresponsible. "I cannot call myself a Christian, and be sincere; and I think, when we come to appreciate the meaning of the word 'Christianity,' and recognize its historical force and power, that no Radical will call himself a Christian."[17] At the first Horticultural Hall meeting, David Wasson replied to Abbot that spiritual truth is not the product of reason or science, but is individually and intuitively grasped and often poetically expressed.[18]

In this view, Wasson anticipated many editorials and essays in the *Radical* throughout the late 1860s and early 1870s, which echoed the prewar transcendentalists in their commitment to truths that are discerned prerationally and their willingness to use a Christian vocabulary even while abandoning the doctrines behind that vocabulary. Thinking not individually but globally, Samuel Longfellow argued that religion is everywhere, and that each religion had its own claims to truth, uniting "earth's millions in the humilities and aspirations of prayer."[19] This view seemed particularly congruent with antebellum transcendentalists like Emerson, Alcott, and Thoreau, with their interests in Asian texts and religions.[20] The argument for the pervasiveness of religion made ridiculous

Christianity's claim to unique and exclusive truth. Still, pushing the boundaries of religion in a global direction caused a backlash from some members, like Benjamin Franklin Underwood, who pressed the movement to abandon all talk of religion whatsoever, as inhibiting free expression of values and behavior derived from no religious tradition but rather from secular humanism.[21]

Similarly, the question of organization, publicity, and recruitment of members divided the Free Religious Association (FRA) from the beginning. The same day as the conflicted speeches at the Horticultural Hall, a Committee on Organization presented a draft of the constitution of the new organization, which opened its membership to anyone who shared its purposes: "to promote the interests of pure religion, to encourage the scientific study of theology, and to increase fellowship in the spirit." There was no theological or creedal test—each person was responsible for his or her beliefs individually—nor was there any central guidance or direction for the policies and activities of the association. Despite the apparent disenchantment with organized religion among segments of the working-class population, especially in eastern cities like Lynn and Worcester, Massachusetts, membership in the FRA never numbered more than several hundred. The first statement of membership, in 1883, announced 250 dues-paying members, half of them in eastern Massachusetts.[22]

Disagreement would pervade the free religion movement, with each position hardening in succeeding years. Rationality or intuition? Christian or post-Christian? Theist or humanist? What the postwar disagreements masked were the places where free religion advocates actually agreed with each other, particularly in their common critique of organized religion's reliance on external authorities, including the authority of Christianity's founder. The *Radical*'s editorial posed the question, "Is Christ *in* the way, or *the* way?"[23] The free religion radicals, whether scientific theists like Abbot or adherents of a transcendentalist spirituality like Johnson, Wasson, or Frothingham, would respond that, understood as the Christ of Christendom rather than the Jesus of the Gospels, he is most definitely in the way. They would also agree that "the sacred," whether discerned empirically or intuitively, is always evolving—"a work in progress," as David Robinson puts it—although, ultimately, materialists like Underwood would disagree even there.[24]

While organization and collective action were never the movement's strong suit, the Free Religious Association did advance its commitment to the widest latitude of thought on religious, political, and social topics through its sponsorship of lectures, pamphlets, and book series. At Boston's Horticultural and Music Halls, the FRA sponsored, in 1869 alone, talks by Julia Ward Howe ("Of Religion"), Ednah Dow Cheney ("Work and Its Relations"), Johnson ("The Piety of Pantheism"), and Abbot ("Free Religion and Christianity"), among many others.

In 1870, attendees heard Wasson talk about "Jesus, Christianity, and Modern Radicalism," Howe on "The Ethics of Culture," and Wendell Phillips on "Christianity," again among others. From 1875 to 1877, the association issued pamphlets on taxation of church property, the Bible and science, transcendentalism, and the question of Sunday business hours. Likewise, the association commissioned essay collections with contributions from Frothingham, Johnson, Abbot, Weiss, Potter, Higginson, Howe, and Cheney, and provided a monthly voice in the *Radical* (1865–1873) and its competitor, the *Index* (1870–1886).[25]

Despite these confusions, behind the postwar movement lay, as one powerful influence, the founding secularity of transcendentalism: its rejection of the fundamental assertions of historical Christianity and its insistence on an orientation toward human flourishing, without abandoning belief in the nonrational and nonmaterial dimensions of life or discarding traditional language to elicit those dimensions; its preference, for good or ill, for collective work that is small-scale and intimate. George Willis Cooke put it this way: "The free religious movement was, in a word, the culmination of transcendentalism, and its acceptance of intuition and self-reliance. It discarded institutional and historical religion, and accepted that of individual spiritual insight and the rational activity of the personal mind."[26]

It is thus no surprise that the conversation circle called the Chestnut Street Club, or Radical Club, that began in May 1867 at the home of John T. and Mary Elizabeth Fiske Sargent, should be so well attended by figures associated with transcendentalism or acquainted with its antebellum members: Emerson, Alcott, Peabody, Frothingham, Higginson, Frank Sanborn, Christopher Cranch, Julia Ward Howe, William Henry Channing, Frederic Henry Hedge, Wasson, Weiss, Henry James Sr., among others. John Sargent, their co-host, was one of the few Unitarian clergymen who exchanged pulpits with Theodore Parker and was consequently dismissed from his position. As editor of *Sketches and Reminiscences of the Radical Club of Chestnut Street, Boston*, Mary Elizabeth Sargent likely wrote the brief unsigned introduction called "Origin of the Club," including this observation: "The Radical Club may be said to have had its origin, in the spring of the year 1867, in the growing desire of certain ministers and laymen for larger liberty of faith, fellowship, and communion. In this respect it was akin to the Transcendentalist movement of earlier date. It was designed to meet a demand for the freest investigation of all forms of religious thought and inquiry." The first meeting attracted thirty participants, and at the closing sessions in 1880 "nearly two hundred were in attendance."[27]

The volume that Sargent produced offers undated summaries of fifty-five papers delivered to the club, together with notes on the discussion that followed. Among those early meetings, the group heard William Henry Channing (1810–

1884), nephew of the influential Unitarian leader William Ellery Channing, speak on "The Christian Name." Channing understood the mission of Christianity to be the elevation of all humanity, the nurturing of the divine spark in each. This would necessarily involve, Channing thought, the deep involvement of the contemporary church in outreach to those at the bottom of the social ladder. "The difference between me and the people classed as criminals is that I have been helped more than they." Calling out the divinity of each person would make Christianity, ultimately, the world's religion. The first to speak after Channing concluded was the group's host, John Sargent, who praised Channing's emphasis on the social mission of Christianity and noted, speaking from his own experience, "the hostility of the clergy and the churches to reform, and the exercise of their influence *against* . . . fraternization with the suffering and oppressed."[28]

The succeeding comments, however, echoed the same divisions of opinion that were evident in the Free Religious Association. Abolitionist Wendell Phillips saw Christianity as the "great moral power" in the world, uniquely situated to lead in global reform. Thomas Wentworth Higginson strongly disagreed, seeing Christianity as no different from other world religions, and Jesus as both inspired but also constrained by his time and culture. Indeed, for David Wasson, the name "Christian" had little appeal, and influenced social betterment only when it interacted with European history and values.[29] Turning this particular screw once more, Julia Ward Howe later recalled how "pained and even irritated" she became, during several such discussions, to hear participants "seek outside the limits of Christianity for all that is noble and inspiring in religious culture." Still, "while I cannot avoid recognizing the anti-Christian twist which mostly prevailed in the Radical Club, I am far from wishing to convey the impression that those of us who were otherwise affected were not allowed the opportunity of expressing our own individual opinions."[30]

Like Howe, other participants in the Radical Club's sessions were often invigorated by the papers and eager to offer their commentary afterwards. This sometimes led to frustration, given time constraints, with the result that, as Elizabeth Peabody wrote, "nobody's opinion can be completely expressed, or made free from the misapprehensions incident to every statement of thought, on questions of such world-wide bearing. But still it is abundantly worth while to have the conversations, because, under all the disadvantages, it is, as all the interlocutors feel, a very suggestive occasion, and may save each of us from getting entirely closed up in the sack of our own notions."[31] In the first years of the Radical Club, contributions tended to reflect the ongoing influence of transcendentalism. Gradually, however, "the club was dominated largely by the scientific spirit," as Cooke observed.[32] As a result, some topics appealed to participants' levels of knowledge and interest more than others. After a paper by Benjamin

Peirce (father of mathematician and pioneer pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce) on astronomers' current understanding of the organization of the solar system, the galaxies, and beyond, there was, Mary Sargent noted drily, "less desire than is generally the case to venture theories or criticisms, though the lack was fully made up by expressions of regard and indebtedness to the speaker of the hour."[33]

At the end of her volume, which features a series of moving tributes to her husband, who had died in 1877, Mary Sargent included excerpts from press coverage of the club over its thirteen years of meetings. Although the anonymous writer of the following reminiscence does not mention Margaret Fuller's conversations, the echo of those and other transcendentalist activities that challenged conventional gender divides seems palpable.[34]

> But what has contributed more than anything, I think, to the popularity of the Radical Club has been the real zest given to the conversation by the presence of both sexes. I remember that on one occasion after the meeting of the Club I went to a gathering of very similar nature, composed of men only. These men were to a considerable extent the same, and, as it chanced, the essayist was the same as in the morning; but it seemed to me that the conversation, good as it was, was lacking in a certain piquant and varied flavor, such as the presence of clever women gives to the Radical Club. I am sure that men themselves talk better, on the whole, where women take part in the conversation; and when it comes to arranging the plan and machinery of such gatherings, the tact and energy of women afford an immense lever; and the Radical Club has always had in this respect some of the characteristics of a French *salon*.[35]

For his part, Radical Club member and frequent presenter Octavius Brooks Frothingham, who had entered Harvard Divinity School a conservative Unitarian like his father Nathaniel but had become radicalized by exposure to transcendentalist thinking, watched with dismay as advocates of free religion engaged in their own internecine conflicts rather than finding common ground. Like the founders and other members of the Radical Club, Frothingham found in small-scale settings a way to move the transcendentalist heritage into the postwar era. In 1869, at his new nondenominational church ("a church of the unchurched," he called it) in New York City, Frothingham preached on "Secular Religion," an apt way to characterize transcendentalist post-Christianity.[36] Indeed, Frothingham had a keen understanding of the ways in which "modern life" had largely escaped the bounds of organized Christianity: "It bows to no spiritual authority, it confesses no total depravity, it believes in no special providence, it has faith in no miraculous interpositions or revelations, it relies on no vicarious atonement." In the same way, "political life" had become entirely focused on liberty and reform in this world rather than "the rules and ends and principles of Christendom."[37]

To some, like Abbot, the influence of transcendentalism was still pernicious in encouraging a clinging to "religion" as an important human activity, leading only to attitudes that were antiscientific or narrowly individualistic. For others wary of its influence, but on the other end of the cultural spectrum, transcendentalism would continue to be a radical and destabilizing force in culture, to be ridiculed and critiqued wherever it appeared to contribute to the imperiled state of organized religion's influence. Finally, there were those who saw transcendentalism as an important cultural heritage but were uncertain about its relevance to the modern postwar world. Such debates would be transcendentalism's fate at its appearance a decade later at the Concord School of Philosophy.

Summer in 1879 was unusually hot and humid along America's eastern seaboard, and no place more so than in Boston's tightly packed neighborhoods. In the tenements of the South End and North End, people sought relief on rooftops and porches, or ventured downtown to Boston Common and the Public Garden, where they mingled with clerks and shopkeepers too busy or too frugal to go to beaches or islands in search of the Atlantic breezes. More prosperous Bostonians were going to northern New England, the Adirondacks, Cape Cod, or to islands off the Cape or nearer the city to wait out the oppressive heat.

All the more surprising, then, that a group of serious-minded citizens, many of them women, should decide to spend several weeks not seeking the breezes of mountains or ocean, but currents of thought. Many of the speakers at the Concord School saw themselves as descendants of the transcendentalists of several decades past. For nine years, men and women, mostly from the northeast, but also from the Midwest and even some Southern states, trekked to Concord, boarding in the village or returning nightly to their own homes, to hear transcendentalists from the prewar movement together with a host of other philosophers and critics. The brainchild of Bronson Alcott, Franklin Sanborn, and William Torrey Harris, the school's annual summer sessions drew the curious, the amused, the reverential, and the interested. They gathered for the first year in the parlor of Orchard House, the Alcotts' home, and then from 1880 on in Hillside Chapel, built for the purpose adjacent to Orchard House with funds provided by Elizabeth Thompson of New York City. Judging from newspaper accounts and reminiscences, a recurrent question on the minds of many observers was the Concord School's connection with transcendentalism. In the opinion of many Americans, the hometown of Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau, and the movement they led bred a bizarre form of mental disturbance, at best, and dangerous social and religious radicalism at worst. They wondered if the Concord School might revive that troubling strangeness at this inopportune time, when the nation was wrestling with railroad strikes, the rise of a militant labor movement, the rapid growth of an industrial economy, significant disparities in

income, and the often-violent return to white rule in Southern states following the end of Reconstruction.

Linking the Concord School and transcendentalism was not illogical, given the school's origins, which dated back to Bronson Alcott's visit to England in 1842 to meet with fellow philosophers and reformers. Envisioning a school based on his understanding of Platonic idealism, Alcott began to assemble books for the library of just such a school, with a number of volumes coming from his friend James Pierrepont Greaves, a disciple of German educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Back in Concord, Alcott built shelves in Orchard House to accommodate the collection.[38] A decade later, Alcott met Frank Sanborn, then an undergraduate at Harvard College, and thought him "a youth of fine genius and great promise."[39] In 1859, Sanborn, now master of Concord's one-room schoolhouse, insisted that Alcott take on the newly created role of Concord's superintendent of schools. By 1860, Sanborn, together with Alcott, Emerson, Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ellery Channing, and David Wasson, had formed a discussion group called the Concord Club. Many of these figures came together again in 1876 to found the Fortnightly Club, and even later, in 1882, William Torrey Harris joined Sanborn, Alcott, and others in a group called the Mystic Club. "In Alcott's mind," writes Sanborn biographer Benjamin Hickok, "all of these groups pointed hopefully toward a school of philosophy in Concord."[40]

Concord itself was an obvious site for launching yet another educational experiment. Alcott had moved there in 1840 after holding and losing a series of posts as a public or private schoolteacher in Connecticut and Pennsylvania and most famously as founder and director of Boston's Temple School. The method that Alcott applied to children, based on the idea that education should foster the individual's critical and expressive abilities as much as convey information, was readily applied to adults as well, and not just by Alcott. Elizabeth Peabody conducted a women's class on historical and literary topics as early as 1833, and in 1839 Margaret Fuller opened a series of far-reaching conversations, primarily for women, at Peabody's West Street bookshop in Boston. Alcott followed suit after 1840 with a series of guided conversations for adults in Concord and, further afield, throughout the Northeast and Midwest.[41]

Recalling his visit to England and the books he had collected there, Alcott took the occasion of a visit from Hiram Jones, an amateur philosopher from Illinois touring Concord in 1878, to revive his dream of a nonsectarian school devoted to "speculative philosophy," illustrated by references to poetry and "higher literature," as local historian George Bartlett put it.[42] In January 1879, Sanborn wrote to Harris, then the superintendent of the St. Louis public schools and a leader in that city's Philosophical Society, to ask if he would teach in the first summer session. Sanborn listed the others he had invited to participate: Ednah

Dow Cheney, Hiram Jones, David Wasson, Cyrus Bartol, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Wendell Phillips. "I am to be Dean of the Faculty—what think you of a scheme like this?" he enthused, prematurely, it turned out.[43]

Although Sanborn considered himself the champion of the transcendentalists' reputations and chief editor of their writing, he was no match for Harris in organizational ability. Harris had, after all, systematized an entire city's public school system in the face of years of sectional and ethnic divisions. In short order, Harris took over from Sanborn as intellectual leader of the school, with Sanborn demoted to secretary and Alcott serving as honorary dean. The first year's prospectus listed the "regular Professors" as Alcott, Harris, Jones, Wasson, and Cheney, with "special presentations" by Sanborn, Higginson, Thomas Davidson, and George Howison. The prospectus went on to specify that "no preliminary examinations are required, and no limitation of age, sex, or residence in Concord will be prescribed, but it is recommended that persons under eighteen years should not present themselves as students, and that those who take all the courses should reside in the town during the term."[44]

Even though the prospectus circulated only a few months, nearly four hundred fee-paying adults signed up for one or more sessions during the first season of the Concord School, enough to convince organizers and doubters alike that there would be more sessions. In early August, when over a hundred people crowded into Orchard House in expectation of hearing Emerson deliver an address on memory (heartbreaking, it was said, given his struggles with that very mental power), the event had to be moved to the vestry of First Parish Church, back up the Lexington Road. Hour after hour, through the stifling days of July and August, those first attendees listened patiently to often highly abstract lectures. On one "parboiling dog day," a group of about seventy-five who had paid to hear the Scots-American philosopher and classics scholar Thomas Davidson lecture on Greek architecture, with glass-slide illustrations, crammed into the Alcotts' parlor "with blankets at the windows and every door remorselessly shut while Mr. Davidson from a rear room projected the pictures down the aisle against a sheet." One could only imagine, a reporter commented, with what desperate amusement the group chuckled at seeing images projected against somebody's knee or "a young woman's white waist."[45]

Still, as that hot first summer wore on, observers who were prepared either to scoff at the resurgence of philosophical thinking or bristle at reminders of Concord's more controversial past were reassured. The line that the founders laid down—that the emphasis would be on ideas, not on social issues or contemporary problems—led the *Boston Herald*'s reporter, for one, to observe that, although "nothing can be done in any new direction without bringing together

the *mongrel tribe of free-lovers*, new lights and persons half insane, who prowl around every movement that holds out the least promise of giving them an entering wedge[,] [t]he Concord school is notably free of all this. The persons in attendance, whether men or women, all belong to the regular orders of society."[46] The *Boston Daily Advertiser*'s writer more pointedly reassured an audience worried about foreign or domestic radicalism: "Destructive theories have no place here, but the prevailing spirit has been markedly conservative. Nor have there been present as listeners any of the communistic sort of people. No attractions were offered to them, and though they could have come if they chose, yet the atmosphere was evidently too unsympathetic."[47] Besides Davidson, attendees at the first session heard Ednah Dow Cheney lecture on art and morality, Harris on Hegelianism, Hiram Jones on Plato, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson on American literature, with reminiscences of Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Longfellow offered by Alcott, Peabody, and Sanborn.

If not the "communistic sort," who did choose to come to Concord for these lectures and discussions? "Summer schools" that mixed education and entertainment were springing up in many spots in postwar America, most notably the Chautauqua Institution in upstate New York. Founded in 1874 as an effort to improve Sunday school teaching, Chautauqua hosted lectures in art history, literature, and philosophy, but soon expanded its offerings to include band and orchestra concerts, music lessons, and theater.[48] In contrast, the curriculum of the Concord School remained steadfastly academic, with a few exceptions of reminiscence and memorial. Neither could it offer much by way of natural beauty except Walden Pond, and that, it was feared, was being overrun by day-trippers from the city. Writing at the close of the first season, journalist Calista Halsey put her finger on one reason for the appeal of the Concord School and other such summer venues: "This summer school is something unique in its way; new in its methods and in the quality of the people whom it has brought together, and the subjects which they will consider. The summer school in itself has become an institution, and finds its reason for being in the fact that the brain-working people of the world, those who really need a vacation, would find absolute idleness stagnatious. . . . And so they compromise on a summer institute which strikes the golden mean between rest and work, and betake themselves to some seaside or lake where, between lessons, they can hear what the wild waves are saying, and where sunsets put a gilt edge on somber lectures."[49]

But if some came as they might have to other summer venues (which would frequently have offered more by way of program or recreation than did the Concord School), others came because of the literary and philosophical associations with Concord and its antebellum writers. For the most part, the uptick in Concord tourism, which coincided with the years of the Concord School, was

prompted by the centennial celebrations of the battles at Lexington and Concord and the unveiling of Daniel Chester French's *Minuteman* statue at the rebuilt North Bridge.[50] Though undeniably a tourist destination, Walden Pond was already becoming something of a sacred site for admirers of Thoreau and even for those Concordians finally reconciled to his eccentric ways. Those who saw it as a convenient escape from summer's heat, especially if they came from Boston's crowded neighborhoods, were not so welcome. The pond was becoming "a mere vulgar picnic and camp-meeting resort," lamented clergyman Julius Ward, "with boats and bathing facilities for hire where Thoreau's hut stood."[51]

On the other hand, native Concordians delighted in what Ward called their "distinguished visitors," whose "summer evenings are enlivened by the renewal of the conversations which have been a feature of the intellectual society of the town for many years." His view was echoed by William Dean Howells, speaking from his "Editor's Easy Chair" at *Harper's*. "The [Concord School's] project seemed to many an attempted transcendental revival which was sure to fail, and perhaps a little ridiculously." But it did not fail. "The good people of Concord did not laugh or pity, but saw with pleasure another leaf added to the laurel of their fame. The conversations recalled the colloquial encounters of Margaret Fuller and Emerson, and Parker and Lowell and Fredrika Bremer, and the brilliant 'transcendental' circle of thirty or forty years ago. The lectures were profound and satisfactory."[52]

Encouraged by the interest and attendance, Alcott, Harris, and Sanborn planned a second season, to run July 12 to August 14, 1880. Added to the returning roster were new presenters including Julia Ward Howe, William Henry Channing, Frederic Henry Hedge, and Harrison Gray Otis Blake, all aligned with the transcendentalist movement (Blake was Thoreau's friend, and would become recipient and protector, not too successfully as it turned out, of Thoreau's manuscript journals).[53] The new Hillside Chapel was dedicated and put to immediate use, as groups of students descended, as before, on Concord. Attendees were "largely composed of cultivated women," observed the *Boston Herald*, the school's most consistent champion. "It would be hard to find anywhere better lectures, more thoughtful, more practical, more concerned with the great subjects which interest the foremost minds of the nation, than are being given at Concord. They bear the marks of original thinking and strike down to the roots of things; they are listened to and sought for because they are live discussions of topics which are always living." The *Boston Daily Advertiser*, that "mouthpiece of New England respectability" (according to a writer for the *New York Times*), put its own stamp of approval on the second season: "That a hundred or [*sic*] fifty men and women from various parts of the country are willing to meet in a fair and historic vil-

lage, the Academe of New England, to converse on these topics . . . is in itself an honor to them and a source of satisfaction to the country."[54]

Privately, respect gave way to sarcasm as the daughter of the school's honorary dean registered her own opinion. "The town swarms with budding philosophers, and they roost on our steps like hens waiting for corn," wrote Louisa May Alcott, whose novels offer incisive accounts of the personal and relational consequences of transcendentalism. "Father revels in it, so we keep the hotel going, and try to look as if we liked it. If they were philanthropists, I should enjoy it; but speculation seems a waste of time when there is so much real work crying to be done. Why discuss the 'unknowable' till our poor are fed and the wicked saved?"[55]

Like the first, the second session was structured around lectures, some of them lasting two hours without a break. Still, those attending seemed quite willing to put up with summer heat and hard benches to listen to John Steinfort Kedney orate on the beautiful and the sublime, or Wasson, Jones, and Harris deliver densely argued lectures on religion, history, and philosophy.[56] Indeed, there were few venues in those years that could match the Concord School for the high level of lectures, delivered to hundreds of men and women who came from eighteen states. In 1882, attendees would hear Harris on Aristotle's *De Anima*, John Watson on "Schelling's Relations to Kant and Fichte," and George Howison on "Present Aspects of Philosophy in Germany."[57]

After the lecture and ensuing discussion, the crowd—and attendance was very soon in the hundreds—would spill out the steps of the plain wooden hall and convene on the grass in front of Hillside for informal conversation. One journalist praised the "informal nature of these conversations, the opportunity they afforded for spontaneity of thought, the scope offered for freedom of utterance, and the wide range of topic, [which] gave them, on certain occasions, a brilliant and exciting tone."[58] George Lathrop, Hawthorne's son-in-law, was also quite entranced with the atmosphere of the Concord School. He wrote of that second season,

> the evening sessions, also, had an attractiveness of their own. The kerosene had been forgotten, the first night, and for a few moments it seemed possible, as the twilight deepened, that spiritual illumination would be the sole dependence. But after that, the lamps of the wise virgins could not have outshone those in the chapel fixtures. With a cool breeze streaming in at open windows, where fine netting repelled the attacks of the pessimistic mosquito, the audience sat with ears intent and hungry note-books. Then, on breaking up, they passed out, under lanterns hung by the door or from fruit-trees close by, into the star-dark, carrying

with them fragments enough for discussion all the way on the mile-long stretch of grass-bordered sidewalk to the village centre.[59]

Some of the appeal of the Concord School was attributed to the charm of Concord itself. Writing in the *Free Religious Index* after the close of the 1880 sessions, Ellen Mitchell noted that "one is not surprised that the serene atmosphere of Concord has been conducive to literary and artistic activity. The din of the world is shut out; the material pursuits of life do not distract attention from its higher interests; man can step here to the measure of the universe."[60]

Still, there were discordant notes. Some of these were in the humorous vein, poking fun at efforts to be philosophical in a material and practical age: "It is doubtful if a single one of the Concord School of Philosophers," according to the *New York Daily Graphic*, "could run a hotel, make a mint julep, roll a cigarette, dig a square hole, tie a bowline knot, set a hen properly, boss an engine at a fire, find out the hole in a leaky roof, back a mule, tell which direction is north when lost in the woods, or take off a lady's gaiters in a graceful and perfectly respectful manner; yet all these and many more are the things necessary and indispensable to be known before human affairs generally can be considered and judged philosophically."[61] Its outer-borough competitor the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* made the same point more playfully: "An escaped inmate of the Concord Summer School of Philosophy, finding himself at large, fled West and lectured in Cheyenne on the exceeding Beanfulness of the Bean. 'Simple psychological phenomena,' he said, 'the intellectual activities of mental faculties, as distinguished from inanimate forces of nature or the irrational impulses of—' And here the audience arose and pomaded his flowing locks with lame eggs. They were a plain, simple folk, they said, but no man could come down from Boston and use such language as those in a room full of ladies."[62]

Less humorous was the argument that boiled up in 1880 about the relation of the Concord School to transcendentalism. Julius Ward, the same clergyman who was concerned about the great unwashed at Walden Pond, celebrated the antebellum transcendentalist movement as "the leaven of the modern democratic spirit working through society and literature upon religion and life" and praised it for having "developed the imaginative power which put reality into the ages of belief."[63] A writer for the *New York Times* similarly saw the Concord School as building upon the insights of the old movement: "people who believed the old transcendental movement dead in New-England will begin to think their opinion stands in need of revision, if they notice the revival of philosophy which has taken place at Concord. The Summer school of philosophy now in progress there is not transcendental, but it owes its being entirely to the breaking out of the transcendental fire in a new place, intellectually speaking." Then, in

a bold move, the writer suggested that the school might have something to say to the nation's current social conflicts: "America has the solution of great race-problems in her hands, unimpeded by the inherited obstacles in other countries; and they can hardly be solved without an adequate philosophy from some source."[64] In 1884, reading aloud sections of Alcott's journals that mention the early days of the transcendentalist movement, Sanborn acknowledged the controversies that the movement had stirred up. At first, transcendentalism was understood as the hobbyhorse of intellectuals, but "this was the springtime of transcendentalism, before it had aroused enemies and united itself with social, political and religious movements, which excited the most violent hostility. The mild weather of spring soon turned to fierce storms and cold east winds, under which the 'apostles of newness' shivered and struggled for years. Poverty, neglect, contempt, misrepresentation were their lot; but they had a good cause and good courage."[65]

Perhaps Sanborn was also referring to the very cold east wind launched by Episcopal bishop Frederic Dan Huntington in 1880. In the mid-1850s, Huntington, then a Unitarian clergyman, had begun to feel the need for a rapprochement with orthodoxy, particularly around the doctrines of Christology and the nearness of the Holy Spirit. Other Unitarian leaders and laypeople agreed that in its zeal to counter the old Calvinism, Unitarianism had ignored the need for a personal and inward faith. By now established as the Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and preacher at Harvard's Appleton Chapel, Huntington announced in 1857 that his *Monthly Religious Magazine* would be devoted to the "great doctrines of the New Testament, repentance, regeneration, faith, holiness, the redemption by Christ, humble dependence on God, the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, the personal presence of Christ to the disciple and the Church" and "the unity of Christ's body." Convinced that he could only sustain these beliefs in a trinitarian fellowship, Huntington resigned his professorship in January 1860 and took orders as a deacon in the Episcopal Church. From then to his death in 1904, Huntington devoted himself to a church which he felt, in Timothy Smith's words, "by the beauty and dignity of its worship, best symbolized the spiritual realities of Christian religion."[66]

Given his desire to build a "people's church" that was reconciling and inviting, Huntington's assault on transcendentalism was remarkable for its vindictiveness. In a long article titled "The 'Summer School' at Concord" reminiscent of Andrews Norton's mudslinging assault on Emerson's "Divinity School Address," Huntington slammed the antebellum movement and praised the Concord School only insofar as it distanced itself from the earlier experiments. He mocked the *Dial* for its "execrable, half-intelligible, affected, Germanized English," but saved his most vicious invective for the Brook Farm community: "So

the experiment went on, hastening to dissolution, and moribund from the start. If there were affinities, so were there antipathies and repulsions. Queer people, impracticable people, disagreeable people, in short, bores and dunces, always attach themselves to novel combinations of that sporadic sort. . . . The weeds grew rank while the unanxious husbandmen discussed the Vedas, recited Schiller . . . or pondered the problems of the universe."[67]

Still, Huntington grudgingly acknowledged that it seemed the old radicalism had faded, and the aging radicals had turned back to orthodoxy. "Mr. Emerson, as we understand him, can no longer be counted among pantheists. Taking his public and private utterances together, we make no doubt that he is a believer in one personal God, and wishes so to be understood. . . . [Bronson Alcott] has allowed it to be stated to the world that he is a Trinitarian, if he has not so declared for himself."[68] Other commentators saw the same thing. "[I]t is indeed a fact much remarked, and a matter of great surprise to many, that there is so much religious and Christian tone about the Philosophy School," wrote the *Boston Evening Traveler.* "The most staunch and orthodox believer in revelation, in the Deity, in miracles and the supernatural, has found much of the strongest and most pronounced Christian faith and teaching in many of the lectures. . . . While all are welcome . . . yet it is a matter of surprised observation that the tone of the school is so far one so largely of religious feeling,—of belief. This is the essential feature that is commanding attention."[69]

On the other hand, some critics were not convinced that the Concord School embraced Christianity in any traditional, recognizable sense. Weighing in a year after Huntington had issued his pronouncements, the minister A. N. Alcott argued that "Dr. Jones reads from the Bible concerning the Logos; but his is not the Church's Logos. Mr. Alcott accepts the Trinity; but his definition of it would utterly evacuate of all meaning any formula ever framed of this doctrine by a Trinitarian, and overwhelm with astonishment any theologian who should look beyond the word, and its jingle, into the sense. Seemingly, one might as well identify length, breadth, and thickness with the Trinity, because they are three." It was ridiculous, he concluded, to imagine that the Concord School lecturers were orthodox Christians just because they used religious language. In fact, this commentator, writing in the journal *Free Religious Index*, had only praise for the enduring critical spirit on display at the Concord School: "The Church itself, at large, could not do better than wholly to lay aside its dry, dead, fixed formulas, and adopt in their place some such living, mobile philosophy as that taught at Concord."[70] Observers of various persuasions were, evidently, hearing what they wanted to hear at Concord during those summers.

Try as they might, the school's leaders could not keep controversy from its doors, and such arguments about transcendentalism seemed inevitable. For

some observers of the Concord School, transcendentalism was its obvious ancestor, a heritage either to be embraced or rejected. Where one set of critics turned to religion to assess the school's fidelity to or departure from transcendentalism, another group took science to be the litmus test. As if Huntington's bitter words were not enough invective, a second series of damning articles in 1880 threatened to diffuse the goodwill that the founders were trying so desperately to infuse into the school. In July, Edwin Mead, a member of the emerging generation of New England social democrats and reformers who would become late-century Progressives, charged that the school's stance toward modern science was "dogmatic," an antagonism he contrasted with antebellum transcendentalism's intellectual openness. "By dogmatic I mean, for instance, the habit of contemptuous reference unsupported by evidence." More to be admired was the "animating and . . . illustrative opposition" transcendentalism had demonstrated "forty years ago."[71]

A month later, in the pages of the *Christian Register*, George Willis Cooke, one of transcendentalism's first bibliographers and early Emerson biographer, took up the accusation of dogmatism. "A dogmatic materialism cannot be cured by a dogmatic spiritualism," he insisted; "the attitude of the Concord School is one of dogmatism . . . [which] denies, rejects, and condemns the scientific methods and results [and] utterly fails to take science up into its own methods, and to make it an aid to its own conclusions." The school was, as a result, propagandistic and unable to tolerate genuine debate. "The real dangers which beset the School of Philosophy," he warned, "are that it will forget how wide and important and all-comprehensive is the domain of philosophic thought."[72] Fred May Holland agreed. Writing in 1886, he quoted from George Bradford Bartlett's 1880 edition of his *Concord Guide Book*, which observed that "it has been thought best to make the school distinctively one of Philosophy, using Literature only as its vehicle or adjunct, and dispensing with Science, as commonly understood. . . . [T]he whole field of empirical and phenomenal investigation will be left for those who have a taste for it." Holland's verdict was succinct: "This is simply saying, 'We are not going to listen to objections.'"[73]

It could have been, though, that the lingering spirit of philosophical idealism so beloved by many transcendentalists was the real problem here. That desire to find large truths and overarching generalizations beyond the welter of material life did seem, from one perspective, to stifle curiosity about the material world. In response to Cooke's charge of dogmatism, Elizabeth Peabody seemed to reflect just that way of thinking when she argued that the school's faculty members were trying to explain "spiritual unity with phenomenal variety."[74] Although such an explanation was common among those who wanted to reconcile modern science with religious claims, it did little to foster debate at the school.

Hiram Jones echoed this standard line in 1882 when he argued for a "theistic science" that would demonstrate the fundamental unity of creation and show that the structure of the universe was identical with that of the divine mind. "The undevout scientist," Jones concluded, "is a lunatic."[75]

So, was transcendentalism in some sense responsible for this exclusion of contemporary science from the roster of topics, or was the exclusion a betrayal of the original transcendentalist spirit of "animating and illustrative opposition," to use Mead's words? The controversy itself suggests that, whatever the answer, transcendentalism was a vital reality for at least some observers and participants, an influence worth arguing about.

For others, though, it was the simple presence of antebellum transcendentalists themselves that provided the greatest draw. The older generation may have been passing away, but a few were still seated on the platform. There was Emerson, suffering from aphasia, delivering a lecture on memory. Here was an edgy exchange between Elizabeth Peabody and Frank Sanborn, who had praised Roger Williams as being in advance of his age and yet who also persecuted Quakers. "Miss Peabody interjected, 'It is very plain you never read the book [Williams's *George Fox Dug Out of His Burrow*] yourself, or you would not say that Roger Williams persecuted the Quakers.' Mr. Sanborn: 'I did not mean that he persecuted them with secular weapons.' Miss Peabody: 'He did not persecute them in any way, and there is nothing of the kind in that book.'"[76]

After the school closed in 1888, reminiscences tumbled from presenters and guests. Lilian Whiting recalled the aged Cyrus Bartol, an original participant in the 1840s Transcendental Club, whose chanting tone and swaying body invariably put Bronson Alcott to sleep. Occasionally, Elizabeth Peabody succumbed too; then "she would suddenly arouse herself with a movement that sent flying in various directions her bag, handkerchief, note-books, pencil, and all her various belongings which those of the younger and non-distinguished persons sitting near considered it an honor to scramble about and pick up for her."[77] Kate Douglas Wiggin offered an extensive reminiscence in *My Garden of Memory*, including a touching account of walking with Peabody, Emerson, Alcott, and the poet Ellery Channing through the Sleepy Hollow cemetery: "I never shall forget it: the sight of the four aged, benignant heads (three of them white with the snows of almost eighty winters) on which the mellow August sunshine poured its flood of light. There was no thought of time in the minds of these geniuses. They paused in their leisurely gait, sat down on a flat gravestone to discuss high themes, moved to another, always forgetting their hats or sticks or portfolios, which I gathered up in safety and retained until the proper moment when they might remember their next engagement."[78]

The most extensive set of reminiscences came during the summer session in 1883, which was entirely devoted to presentations on Emerson, who had died the

previous year. But reminiscence can serve to mummify the past rather than make it part of a living present, and this was the sad conclusion Edwin Mead drew. For him, the Concord School's link to transcendentalism was "local, biographical, and reminiscent." It had made for a fine summer pastime "to sit in an audience of which Emerson is one, to see and hear men who knew Thoreau and Hawthorne and John Brown and the young man Alcott in the days of the *Dial*." But there was no vital connection between that golden past and the concerns of the present.[79]

Frank Sanborn, who assiduously cultivated his connection with the Concord writers and with transcendentalism, argued that from the outset the school had been only partially indebted to transcendentalism and should not be seen in light of the earlier movement. In response to a column in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, which had apparently been written shortly after the close of the school, Sanborn offered a long account of the school's origins and philosophy. The *Globe-Democrat*'s journalist had made a number of mistakes, including attributing both the founding of the school and the reason for its closing to Emerson, and Sanborn took pains to correct this. He was especially concerned to counter the journalist's claim about the purpose of the Concord School. "The school never 'taught unadulterated transcendentalism,' whatever that may be," Sanborn insisted, "but from the first three quite distinct currents of philosophy flowed together in its teachings—of which only one was what is usually termed 'New England Transcendentalism.'" What the other two were Sanborn did not specify, but it is likely he meant Platonism and Hegelianism.[80]

If any one individual was responsible for redirecting the radical and secular impulses of transcendentalism as they might have emerged at the Concord School, it was William Torrey Harris. For the first seasons of the school, Harris had rented Orchard House, and in 1884 he bought the entire house and grounds.[81] Despite this tribal gesture, his mind and energy moved in a very different direction. For him, the great need in postwar society was for system, system in thought, organization, and behavior, and the answer lay in Hegel's philosophy. Harris saw Hegel's dialectic as providing both method and answer to a host of pressing national problems, including industrialization, education, and postwar Reconstruction. Every problem could be restated as thesis and antithesis, its solution as a synthesis. By the time Harris became St. Louis superintendent of schools, he exerted what Martin Bickman has called "a conservative force, emphasizing the value of textbooks and the differentiated curriculum against innovations that were attempts to make education more experiential and holistic." Harris's philosophical idealism "had become a rationale for existing educational practices and served as a defensive stance toward new weather in the intellectual climate, as signaled by such theories as Darwinism and pragmatic instrumentalism."[82] The sheer force and energy by which Harris and his fellow Hegelians applied the dialectic to every issue were at odds with the ex-

perimental and improvisatory approach of the transcendentalists. In St. Louis, Harris and his colleagues found other forms of radicalism equally suspect. Their celebration of German culture and philosophy did not extend to socialists and anarchists, nor to "the immigrant laborer, the untutored, the boorish."[83] By extension, Harris would also not have welcomed any suggestion that transcendentalism's embrace of communitarianism might speak to the pressing postwar issues of capital and labor.

Relocated in the East, Harris clarified the conservative implications of his Hegelianism, arguing that humanity expresses itself best through institutions and only rarely through the witness of eccentric or visionary individuals. "All institutions of man—and it cannot be repeated too often that human nature is revealed in and by means of institutions alone—are combinations or organizations of man, united under the direction of an ideal," he wrote.[84] Summaries of Harris's lectures at the Concord School nearly always remarked on his insistence upon structure, organization, and discipline. As for Emerson's notion of self-reliance or Margaret Fuller's version of self-culture, Harris dismissed them all in a lecture titled "Philosophy and Religion." George Parsons Lathrop, Hawthorne's son-in-law, summarized the lecture this way: "the affirmation of the individual reason as ultimate measure of all things is an utter negation of the universal and absolute reason." Without the support and affirmation of solid structures, Harris had argued, "the puny individual, at his weakest because most ignorant stage, cuts loose from the world of realized reason and its institutions, and in his grim loneliness turns to reconstruct a new world"—a hopeless task, indeed.[85]

Likewise, it soon became clear that Harris was a moving force behind the Concord School's rapprochement with orthodox Protestant Christianity, with its array of beliefs in the revealed truth of Scripture, the fallenness of humanity, the divinity of Jesus, and the doctrine of the Trinity. "Professor Harris strongly combats pantheism in all its forms and materials, and his religious views are, substantially, those of the Congregational denomination of which he is a member," wrote the *Boston Traveler* in 1880. In that same year George Cooke was emphatic in stating, "the School of Philosophy does not occupy the ground of the old Transcendentalism. Emerson and his co-workers laid so much stress on the ability of the soul to testify to the truths of religion that they ignored the real claims of historical Christianity." The Concord School had become, under Harris's forceful hand, "brave, conservative, and helpful," thought a *Boston Daily Advertiser* reporter.[86] Whether this was a good thing or not depended, in large measure, on what one thought about transcendentalism.

There were a few places, though, where something of the spirit, method, and language of transcendentalism were felt at the Concord School, a few moments

for "the breaking out of the transcendental fire in a new place," as a *New York Times* reporter put it. In connecting the work of Margaret Fuller to their own insights, Julia Ward Howe and Ednah Dow Cheney sought to bring transcendentalism into the late nineteenth century. For Fuller, the secular transcendentalist ideals of self-culture and human flourishing were at odds with a gendered world where women were largely barred or discouraged from advanced learning, careers, and fulfillment of their promise. The transformation of society, Fuller had argued, required the emancipation of fully half of its members. Howe and Cheney imagined that emancipation in different ways, Howe arguing that, since the sexes were inherently different, individuals should seek fulfillment in another, or in a special other, while Cheney saw each individual as possessing the potential of complete selfhood, which was too often stifled by gender assumptions and limitations.

At least one commentator was pleased that women were so well represented at the Concord School, certainly in the number of attendees, but also among the speakers and guests. In the second season, these included Peabody, Susan Blow, Laura Fisher (superintendent of the St. Louis kindergarten system), and women representing educational groups from southern and western states.[87] On the other hand, even though Howe and Cheney presented frequently at the Concord School, they were left off the list of "permanent and active" faculty, excluded from journalistic accounts of the sessions, and relegated to "Women's Day at Concord."

What else could be expected? Sanborn insisted, after its close, that the school was never intended to be a continuation of antebellum transcendentalism, and none of its founders thought of it as a center for reform or a think tank for social change. It would not harbor eccentrics, misfits, or critics, except for the aged survivors (unless, as several journalists thought, philosophy and eccentricity were the same). It was a summer school for adults in the tradition of the "pursuit of knowledge under difficulties," in Joseph Kett's words, a dose of high-level reflection on philosophy and the arts as its lecturers conceived of those topics.[88] The transcendentalism officially remembered in the Concord School was largely stripped of its radical and secular dimensions. The school celebrated the figures of the past, but for the most part its presenters and leaders chose to seal them off in the past or simply to view the survivors as elders respected but clearly no longer in their prime.

This version of remembering transcendentalism arose precisely because the school's leaders, Harris and Sanborn, were insistent on maintaining its conventional and noncontroversial spirit, and thus mostly recollected the parent movement in the same fashion. In their hands, the school refused to engage the challenges of the postwar age posed by modern science and social change, despite

the hope of the *New York Times* writer in 1880 that it might offer some approach to the nation's "great race-problems." If transcendentalism was to be carried forward in any vital sense into the postwar decades and the new century, it would need to find new venues and new forms of expression. In Howe's and Cheney's appropriations and extensions of Fuller's work, we see efforts to do just that. The problem was that for many younger, reform-minded Americans, transcendentalism seemed a vestige of a past which, while honorable, was quaint, sometimes amusing, and mostly irrelevant.

THREE } *Gender, Reform, and Ridicule*

The reporters exaggerated the seriocomic qualities of the Concord School to make their stories appealing to editors and readers, even when they weren't mocking its philosophical pretensions: Elizabeth Peabody dozing during lectures, suddenly awakening as her papers and handbag went flying; Tom Davidson's glass slides projected onto the white dresses of his young viewers, causing a little frisson of excitement among the young men. If they had known about it, they might also have observed Frank Sanborn seething as Harris muscled his way into the premier leadership role of the school, to say nothing of moving into the Alcott house itself.

While the anecdotes were amusing and sometimes revealing, they also mask both the limitations and the contributions of the school. With the exception of William James's lecture there in 1883, the school's leadership steered away from substantive engagement with the emerging physical and biological sciences and with the work of professional philosophers. On the other hand, given the yearly attendance, the return of many attendees, and the distance some traveled from the South and the Midwest, the school clearly met a need for a kind of adult education not found elsewhere. With few amenities and no attractions of musical or theatrical performances like Chautauqua offered, the Concord School persisted in offering its subscribers a rigorous, extended series of lectures on philosophy, religion, ancient history, and the arts.

Even more, as Tiffany Wayne points out, the school engaged important questions of vocation, self-culture, and continuing education, all issues crucial to middle-class women insistent on their own intellectual and social growth. Indeed, making fun of the school, rendering it through a series of anecdotes, associating it with female attendees and feminized presenters, and diminishing the radical nature of transcendentalism were equivalent strategies for the school's detractors.[1] As educational possibilities for women expanded in the postwar years, the Concord School made a distinctive contribution to those opportunities. Despite their absence from the roll of "professors," Elizabeth Peabody, Ednah Dow Cheney, and Julia Ward Howe all made significant contributions to the lectures and discussions at the school.

In February 1884, while the organizers of the Concord School of Philosophy were planning yet another session, Henry James traveled to Paris, hoping to see

the writers who had inherited the literary tradition of his boyhood idol Honoré de Balzac. It had been nine years since James had visited the French naturalists, and now he was returning as an established novelist. James was put off by the frank portrayals of what he considered sordid material, but he greatly admired the skill shown by Alphonse Daudet, Émile Zola, and Edmond de Goncourt in conveying that material: "there is nothing more interesting to me now than the effort and experiment of this little group," he wrote to William Dean Howells, "with its truly infernal intelligence of art, form, manner—its intense artistic life. They do the only kind of work, today, that I respect; and in spite of their ferocious pessimism and their handling of unclean things, they are at least serious and honest."[2] Henry never lost his respect for this circle, especially Zola. In a letter of 1902, James described Zola as an "unseductive, ungarnished *grand homme* of art," and he followed that assessment with an article on Zola that appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1903.[3]

James's visits with the naturalists reinforced his desire to portray Boston as Zola and the others had captured Paris or the way Dickens had delineated London, in a domestic social novel with the same richly dense texture of material and cultural life. "The whole thing as local, as American, as possible, and as full of Boston: an attempt to show that I *can* write an American story. . . . Daudet's *Evangéliste* has given me the idea of this thing. If I could only do something with that *pictorial* quality!" James fulfilled his desire to paint a domestic drama on a large social canvas in the novel he first called *Verena*, and then *The Bostonians*.[4] Like his French masters, James located that drama in a jumbled and disordered material world. Looking out Olive Chancellor's drawing room window, James's protagonist Basil Ransom observes "something inexorable in the poverty of the scene, shameful in the meanness of its details, which gave a collective impression of boards and tin and frozen earth, sheds and rotting piles, railway-lines striding flat across a thoroughfare of puddles . . . ; loose fences, vacant lots, mounds of refuse, yards bestrewn with iron pipes, telegraph poles, and bare wooden backs of places."[5]

These scenes of urban disarray appear intended to echo the social disarray the novel portrays and satirizes, for James's novel sets out not only to detail the material lives of its characters but also to locate them in a fictional world of shifting social behavior and cultural values, what he called an "American story." At the same time, James brought to bear personal and family history and influences, particularly those of his parents, both of whom had died in 1882. With his father's passing, the son was now simply Henry James, and he set to work on this project in summer 1884. The first installment of *The Bostonians* appeared in the February 1885 number of the *Century*, whose editor, with perhaps unconscious

humor, chose to follow James's chapters with the Duke and Dauphin sections from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

As the early installments began to appear, the eighty-one-year-old Elizabeth Palmer Peabody was recovering from an extended lecture circuit in support of the Paiute people in Nevada and their spokesperson, Sarah Winnemucca. A brilliant speaker with a compelling story, Winnemucca recounted what was becoming an often-experienced fate for native peoples: pushed onto desolate lands, gulled by Indian agents, some, including her own husband, addicted to alcohol and gambling, their children threatened with removal to distant boarding schools. Peabody traveled with Winnemucca on speaking tours in New York, Connecticut, Vermont, and throughout Massachusetts, wearing herself out and trying the patience of her friends and family. "She declares she is well," Elizabeth's sister Mary Peabody Mann wrote to Eleanor Lewis in May 1885, "but she is apt to believe what she wishes to, & I shall not know till I get her into her own bed."[6]

These two sometime Bostonians, the novelist now living in England and wrestling with a novel that was already much longer than he anticipated, and the activist nearing the end of a long life devoted to some of the major reforms of the mid-nineteenth century, collided in the pages of James's novel. Despite the writer's protests that he had "not seen Miss Peabody for 20 years" and had "no shadow of . . . intention" to model Miss Birdseye on Elizabeth Peabody, readers and critics from his time to ours have had no difficulty in seeing the real person only faintly disguised in the fictional character.[7] Henry had in fact seen Peabody on the Isle of Wight in 1878 and shared with his brother William that he had "walked on the downs and conversed" with her.[8] Perhaps William remembered that letter. Whether he did or not, William made the connection between Miss Peabody and Miss Birdseye immediately, as did their aunt Kate Walsh and family friend James Russell Lowell, and criticized his brother's satire in a letter Henry described as an "assault." In an often-quoted letter of February 14, 1885, Henry responded that "Miss Birdseye was evolved entirely from my moral consciousness, like every person I have ever drawn, & originated in my desire to make a figure who should embody in a sympathetic, pathetic, picturesque & at the same time grotesque way, the humanitary & *ci-devant* transcendental tendencies."[9] He followed this up the following day with a letter in which he argued that, if Peabody herself were to have read the descriptions of Miss Birdseye, she would not take offense: "if Miss Peabody *should* think I meant to portray her (which, however, heaven forfend!) she cannot on the whole feel that what I had in mind is not something very fine & is not tenderly & sympathetically expressed."[10] For her part, Elizabeth Peabody was just then recovering from her efforts on behalf of

Winnemucca and the Paiutes and beginning to write the first of several letters of reminiscence of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and seems not to have noticed the satire upon herself in the pages of the *Century*.

James had mixed feelings about his novel from the start. He admitted to William, who retracted his harshest criticism after reading more of the novel, that he (Henry) did not quite understand the people and issues he portrayed. "I had the sense of knowing terribly little about the kind of life I had attempted to describe—& felt a constant pressure to make the picture substantial by thinking it out." Now that this novel, or any completed work for that matter, was "finished & cast upon the waters it has, for me, quite sunk beneath the surface—I cease to care for it & transfer my interest to the one I am next trying to float."[11] If the fact that James chose not to revise the novel for inclusion in the New York edition of his works is any indication, it had indeed "sunk beneath the surface" for him.

In contrast, among James's critics and commentators the novel has generated a continuing storm of readings, and every recent piece of scholarship has featured a substantial review of the points and sites of contention.[12] With few exceptions, the arguments have swirled around James's portrayal of the three central characters, Olive Chancellor, Basil Ransom, and Verena Tarrant, and the struggles of the first two for possession of the last. The novel locates that struggle in the contexts of lingering post–Civil War sectional rivalry and its version of the women's movement of the 1870s. Beyond that, there is no critical consensus. Does the novel celebrate Basil's eventual victory in winning and marrying Verena, despite her tears, "not the last she was destined to shed," at the end? Does it express outrage at Basil's brutal chauvinism in pursuing and conquering Verena, or is it critical of Olive's cool "purchase" of Verena from her parents so that she could have control of the young woman's political (and, likely, sexual) education? Does the novel privilege heteronormativity, or does it nonjudgmentally offer the possibility of a lesbian relationship? Is the novel better read as understanding all marital or marital-like relationships as political, involving the distribution of power? Is it a meditation on the fate of privacy in an emerging era of publicity and the public? Should we think of the novel as an expression of James's tortured relationship with his father's perspective on gender, or should we resist the reduction of its aesthetic appeal to matters of genealogy or ideology?

However readers may respond to these questions and the approaches they reflect, the status of Miss Birdseye seems assured. Readers agree with William James: we cannot read Miss Birdseye without reference to Elizabeth Peabody, and many readers would agree with Daniel Heaton that "she is seen in an almost exclusively negative light in the early chapters of the book, but in an equally consistent positive light in the latter two-thirds of the novel."[13] Even more: while

scholars from the 1940s to the mid-1960s sought to portray Miss Birdseye as the quintessential and pitiably ineffective Bostonian reformer, recent scholars have largely let her alone, focusing their attention on the central threesome and their operatic conflict.

Revisiting the various renditions of Miss Birdseye may yield, on the other hand, deeper insights if we consider first the sharply caricatured version when we encounter her at Verena's Boston debut, and then her other appearances later in the novel, ending with her last conversation and death at the fictional Cape Cod resort town of Marmion. This shift in treatment raises the question of why Miss Birdseye is first satirized and then heroicized, and draws us toward the complicated understandings of transcendentalism in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

One approach for understanding these various versions of Peabody/Birdseye is to note that transcendentalism and transcendentalists began increasingly to appear, in the decades following the Civil War, as the subject of humorous anecdotes. In their own time, the antebellum transcendentalists, particularly Bronson Alcott and Margaret Fuller, were ridiculed on occasion, Alcott for his prolix thought and expression, Fuller for her audacity in championing women's independent thought and action. From within the movement, Emerson was the object of some humor, notably in Christopher Cranch's caricature sketches of the reserved essayist as transparent eyeball and elsewhere as "expanding like corn and melons." Often, the movement's adherents were mocked for their intellectual slackness and the vagueness of their rhetoric. But, just as often, transcendentalists were taken seriously and often opposed vigorously, seen for the social and intellectual radicals they were.

In the postwar years, however, as the leading figures aged and the movement's influence dispersed in several directions, humor, both genial and dismissive, became just as prevalent as serious engagement or thoughtful reflection. Henry James's friend and contemporary Henry Adams ridiculed the transcendentalists in his review of O. B. Frothingham's *Transcendentalism in New England: A History*: "Transcendentalists . . . renounced allegiance to the Constitution, continuing the practice of law; went through a process when they bought a piece of land which they called 'releasing it from human ownership'; sought conspicuous solitudes; looked out of windows and said, 'I am raining'; clad themselves in strange garments; courted oppression; and were, in short, unutterably funny."[14] One can catch glimpses of Thoreau, Alcott, Parker, and the inhabitants of Fruitlands in this satiric sketch.

Elizabeth Peabody, however, generated more than her share of anecdotal humor in the 1870s, the decade of James's emergence as a novelist, and 1880s, the decade of his composition and publication of *The Bostonians*. Some of these

anecdotes derive from Peabody's presence at the Concord School of Philosophy and were recounted earlier. Her cap, her perpetually askew glasses, her badgering of friends and donors for funds for sometimes quixotic causes—all these were also sources of humor. But the ones of most interest here are those that have to do with vagueness, indeterminacy—even, in one instance, "dissoluteness." Edward Emerson's anecdote about the James family's dinner-table mention of Peabody, here disguised as "Jane Smith," gets at the particular quality the Jameses found outrageously funny. The topic was arts teacher William Rimmer (1816–1879), whose lectures Peabody found compelling. Henry Senior exclaimed, according to Emerson, that "'the man's a fraud! It's impossible he should be anything else if Jane Smith believes in him! . . . Wh-wh-why! J-Jane Smith—she's one of the most d-d-dissolute old creatures that walks the earth.'" The James family "shouted with joy," Emerson noted, "though knowing well the saintly, if too optimistic character of the old lady, at the Jamesian felicity of the adjective. For they saw, in memory, the gray hair falling down under the bonnet askew, the spectacles slipping down with resulting upturned radiant face, the nondescript garments and general dissolving effect, symbolizing the loose reasoning and the charity falling all abroad—yes, in a sense a dissolute personality."[15]

Even William James, who rose to Peabody's defense when the first installment of *The Bostonians* offered a portrait of Peabody very much like the one in that anecdote, found the old reformer amusing in her vagueness and eccentricity. Lecturing at the Concord School of Philosophy in 1883 about the "stream of consciousness," with Peabody dozing on the platform, James invoked "the Infinite." Peabody awoke and said, "The Infinite—we should all strive to rest upon the bosom of the Infinite," and fell back asleep. James clearly shared the amusement of the young people, who were trying without much luck to stifle their giggles.[16]

Undoubtedly, Peabody did and said things people found amusing, if also endearing: falling into snowbanks and asking her helpers, as they pulled her up, if they knew about Sarah Winnemucca; walking into trees on Boston Common and saying that she "saw them, but did not realize them"; her black and red petticoat and white stockings visible as her hoop skirt went flying up when a streetcar accelerated, and so on. Still, it is noteworthy that the humor was mostly generated by younger men and directed against old people, and particularly at an older woman whose power in the culture derived neither from her family nor her matrimonial status but only from her reputation, which the James family found "dissolute."

When we return to the portrait of Miss Birdseye in the opening chapters of *The Bostonians* and place it in the context of anecdotes not just about Elizabeth Peabody but also about transcendentalism, certain characteristics begin to sound familiar. Miss Birdseye "had a sad, soft, pale face, which . . . looked as

if it had been soaked, blurred, and made vague by exposure to some slow dissolvent." This softening and transparency of the skin and features is judged to be the consequence not of age so much as "the long practice of philanthropy." She belonged to many groups and embraced many causes, but "this did not prevent her being a confused, entangled, inconsequent, discursive old woman, whose charity began at home and ended nowhere, whose credulity kept pace with it, and who knew less about her fellow-creatures, if possible, after fifty years of humanitary zeal, than on the day she had gone into the field to testify against the iniquity of most arrangements."[17]

Like the real-life Peabody, Miss Birdseye is dressed inattentively, the pockets of her skirts bulging with memoranda and notes, her spectacles lost somewhere on her forehead, her brooch perpetually falling off her blouse. Here in the opening chapters Miss Birdseye is melting before our eyes. She is unlike the other, more colorfully drawn characters, the "plain, spare" Mary Prance, the radiant Verena Tarrant with her red hair, the greasy and manipulative Selah Tarrant, the sly reporter Matthew Pardon with his prematurely white hair, the coolly brilliant, immaculate Olive Chancellor, her eyes "the glitter of green ice," the slim, dark-skinned Basil Ransom with his long black hair tied back. Miss Birdseye is somehow incomplete, hard to pin down, hard to grasp and easy to dismiss as inconsequential, the remnant of an old era.

This is not the novel's last account of the old reformer or the reform movements she embodied, but let us stay with this opening portrait a bit longer. Again, we might ask, is the description of Miss Birdseye as a "confused, entangled, inconsequent, discursive old woman" intended to be humorous, dismissive, or satiric? If humorous, does the novel intend to make fun of an old woman at the end of her career, hence its author's dismissive "*ci-devant*"? If dismissive, then what do we make of the more redeeming touches of her "humanitary zeal" and her wayward spectacles? And if satiric, what is being satirized and from what point of view?

Maynard Mack's classic essay "The Muse of Satire" sheds light on the satiric dimensions and limitations of this opening portrait of Miss Birdseye. Published in 1951, Mack's essay emerged in an era before the groundswells of postmodernism, new historicism, and forms of identity-driven scholarship made his critical approach seem pre-theoretical. Nonetheless, there is much in his brief essay that is valuable. Mack resists the easy move from writer as person to author as creator, and points, for example, to the difference between Wordsworth's autobiographically infused poetry and Pope's penchant for taking on various authorial voices not to be confused with his own biography. Satire, in the hands of writers like Pope, is an artifice, a rhetorical technique with a long history in classical and Renaissance literature. Mack argues that satire involves some exaggeration

of characteristics of public figures lightly cloaked in fictional disguise, whose behavior derives from but also violates commonly accepted standards of behavior or expression. Unlike tragedy, which turns on challenges to socially accepted norms, satire "asserts the validity and necessity of norms, systematic values, and meanings that *are* contained by recognizable codes."[18]

Part of Henry James's recoil at the outrage over the portrait of Miss Birdseye undoubtedly came from being caught out in claiming he did not have Elizabeth Peabody at all in mind. But it may also stem from his employment of the traditional form of satire, since, after all, Peabody was a public figure and thus, he may have assumed, fair game for satire. In pursuing Mack's insight, we may ask about the purpose of James's satire. What do Birdseye's/Peabody's appearance and manner exaggerate and against what standards or preferences is she being judged?

This portrait of Birdseye/Peabody in *The Bostonians* together with the other circulating anecdotes about Peabody and about transcendentalism suggest that for some postwar readers and reform activists, the movement and its adherents increasingly appeared to be (or to have been) disorganized, illogical, sunnily optimistic, and eccentric, qualities which seemed at odds with the more disciplined, market-conscious, and socially decorous late-nineteenth-century middle class which inherited their reform interests and regional identity. In a brief but illuminating essay on this novel, Wai Chee Dimock points out that Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer adapt Marx's critique of the mystification function of the market—which obscures "its own arbitrary assignment of value, so that the commodity ends up confronting its human maker as a sovereign object, an autonomous given, and a complete enigma"—and emphasize not so much mystification as what Dimock calls an "adequating rationality." A social world governed by adequating rationality "not only denies the existence of the incommensurate; it also denies the existence of the unidentifiable."[19] Dimock's principal example of such a rationality is Olive Chancellor's "economic transaction" with Selah Tarrant, bargaining for possession of Verena. In Olive's mind, she has figured Verena out as "someone with a price tag." In contrast, Dimock writes, Verena presents herself as a "perpetual enigma," someone who cannot be reduced, explained, or resolved. Similarly, Miss Birdseye cannot quite be figured out. She is, at the beginning of the novel, given to us as vague, indistinct, fuzzy. The fact that the novel struggles to describe her—"confused, entangled, inconsequent, discursive"—suggests that she is truly "ec-centric," and thus eludes "adequating rationality."

If we move beyond the pages of James's novel, we may see that this preference for clarity of character and predictability of behavior is not just a fictional device, but is legible elsewhere in late-nineteenth-century middle-class American culture as well. In the early childhood education movement, for example, founding

figures like Peabody, her sister Mary Peabody Mann, and Susan Blow all emphasized the nurture of the individual child's moral autonomy and distinctive identity. For them, the kindergarten was an extension of the child's home environment, the kindergarten teacher a surrogate mother. This emphasis on individuality was commensurate with developing the child's sense of social responsibility, they believed. As Dominick Cavallo puts it, "Thus the creative paradox of idealism: the more the child's idiosyncratic abilities were cultivated, the more he recognized his inseparability from, and 'oneness' with, his fellows."[20] This paradox was thoroughly in keeping with Peabody's earlier desire to protect children's sense of privacy, as when she criticized Bronson Alcott for insisting that his Temple School pupils respond to queries about their inner thoughts and feelings when they were clearly uncomfortable doing so.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, however, the transcendentalist-inspired character of the kindergarten movement came under sustained assault. To many younger practitioners, the assumptions of their elders like Peabody were both philosophically and practically suspect. Romantic theories of education had centered on the cultivation of qualities already inherent in the growing child. In contrast, emergent theories of evolution suggested that most human inclination and behaviors were the product of nurture and environment. So, while some families might be synchronous with the moral development and social play encouraged in kindergartens, others might not be. Increasingly, younger kindergarten teachers like Patty Hill Smith and Agnes Burke saw immigrant families living in overcrowded urban tenements as incapable of providing adequate education and socialization to their impressionable children.

Encouraged by John Dewey's and G. Stanley Hall's progressive theories of education as socialization, kindergarten advocates now strongly encouraged removing children from these supposedly disruptive environments as soon as possible and resocializing them into more regulated and productive behaviors. Rather than develop the child's individual moral response, the new kindergartners (as the teachers were then called) stressed the importance of the peer group, where shaming of wayward children was intended to bring about social conformity. As Cavallo observes, "it was not simply that the child in the progressive kindergarten was more socially oriented than his counterpart in the idealist kindergarten. The progressive kindergarten pupil had no place to hide, no inviolate inner sanctum off-limits to intrusions by peers or superiors. His most private, inner processes were subject to the controls and measurements of peers and educational specialists."[21]

In yet another arena of social reform, intellectuals and activists were also turning away from an antebellum emphasis on the primacy of the individual

toward the well-being of society as a whole. Here, feminists challenged the notion of romantic love as the cement of attraction that led to and persisted in marriage. Romantic love, argued reformers like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mary Putnam Jacobi, Parker Pillsbury, and dozens of others, was rooted in fantasy, intense feeling, and a privacy that isolated couples in their separate worlds and led all too often, when emotions were distorted or thwarted, to spousal abuse. Gripping romantic passions, simultaneously embraced and warned against in much late-eighteenth and early nineteenth century transatlantic culture, now seemed immature and destructive in a world that valued rational ordering.

In place of romantic individualism, transcendentalist experimenting, or conventional theology, reformers sought the way to healthier relationships and a more rational social life in the scientific discourses of physiology, biology, sexual hygiene, and sex education. William Leach captures this new emphasis succinctly: "Love of health, obsession with bodily processes, adoration of science—all these things were symptoms of the rational frame of mind that marked the movement away from the excessive individualism of the antebellum period."[22]

Little marked the appeal of a "rational frame of mind" so strikingly in postwar reform circles as the positivism of Auguste Comte. Like the other great European theorists of world-historical law, Hegel and Marx, Comte sought a universal explanation for what he perceived to be the development of human societies over time. He found his explanation in the law of three stages, which proposed that humanity moves progressively from a theological through a metaphysical and into a positive stage. The first, "primitive" stage sees the world as enchanted and supernaturally caused, the second moves toward more abstract and impersonal explanations, while the third operates strictly according to scientific description and explanations. Comte's universal laws were matched by his theorizing of a new social structure and a new "positive religion." Presided over by experts and a new priesthood, Comte imagined that altruistic love, embodied in women and especially in mothers, would replace competitive individualism and national conflict. As Gillis Harp puts it, "although he was concerned that social ills be eliminated through empirical study and planned intervention, real improvement for Comte could only be founded upon order, the kind of stable hierarchical order evident in nature."[23]

Versions of Comte emerged everywhere in the postwar reform world. Many Americans first encountered Comte in Harriet Martineau's 1853 translation and abridgement of Comte's six-volume *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830–1842) and promptly began to use what they understood of his ideas for their own purposes.[24] For some Free Religionists, the de-divinizing of religion in Comte's second and third stages corresponded to their own interest either in an impersonal deity or in one that is identical with natural law. Reform-minded Americans

who were unwilling to embrace the scientism of the Free Religion radicals also, paradoxically, found Comte appealing. For example, despite her philosophical idealism and resistance to any system that led to a loss of individual agency, even Elizabeth Peabody found in Comte some reinforcement for her notion that the divine is to be found within and among humanity as a whole.[25]

For the most part, American reformers overlooked the disappearance of God in Comte's system and preferred to stress the value of applying scientific methods to social organization. As Comtean and Unitarian clergyman Joseph Henry Allen put it, "step by step, the theological is supplanted by the scientific, the divine by the human view. It is, in other words, a 'religion of humanity,' taking the place, in our generation, of a religion of dogma. . . . History, politics, economy, social statics and dynamics, the laws of wealth, the laws of charity, the laws of character, the laws of crime,—these we must make the subject-matter of our study, when we seek to follow out any line of practical duty and morals."[26] In this they echoed Comte's proposed social structure, presided over by a caste of experts much like themselves.

While Peabody found in Comte a validation of her desire to relocate the divine in the common life of humanity, there was a world of difference between her understanding of what makes community and the approaches embraced by Comte and his adapters. In writing about Brook Farm in 1842, Peabody emphasized the fragility and experimentalism of the effort. "The attempt is made on a very small scale," she wrote, involving only "a few individuals," each of whom needed to pledge their "personal power [that is, their labor], whether bodily or mental . . . no matter how much money he brings besides." Peabody hoped that the project would not be "tainted" with the label of "transcendentalist," a clear indication of the suspect nature of the movement in the 1840s. In fact, she hoped that transcendentalism, "notwithstanding its name is taken in vain by many moonshiny youths and misses who assume it," would in fact be understood to reflect the non-sectarian nature of the effort.[27] Two years later, Peabody reflected on Brook Farm's reorganization as a Fourierist community and expressed deep reservations. As she understood it, Fourier's analysis of human behavior focused solely on material and physical attributes, and left out insights that come through intuition and imagination. "A system which accepts the social passions, and even the senses of man in full, and puts them on the same ground with the functions of Reason, seems to be a dead-leveller."[28] Had she thought to compare Comte's totalistic system with Fourier's, she might have made the same criticism of both, that they slight the "infinite worth and depth in the individual soul," the unfolding of which she had called "the final cause of human society."[29]

The first portrait of Birdseye/Peabody in *The Bostonians*, satirizing her as soft-focused and dissolving, aligned with the dismissal in some sectors of the

reading-and-reform public of eccentricity and individuality in personal appearance and manner. Just as the novel was appearing, Elizabeth Peabody's own postwar signature reform of the kindergarten was itself under attack as idealist and outmoded, based on dated assumptions about human nature and ill-equipped to deal with the complexities of modern urban life. But Miss Birdseye appears again in the novel, and in a strikingly different manner. Having "purchased" Verena from her parents, Olive Chancellor installs her protégée in her Charles Street apartment. They study feminist periodicals, read history, attend lectures, hear music at the "Music Hall," and, not least, keep company with Miss Birdseye. It strikes both young women, and particularly Olive, that the old reformer is "the last link in a tradition, and that when she should be called away the heroic age of New England life—the age of plain living and high thinking, of pure ideals and earnest effort, of moral passion and noble experiment—would effectually be closed. It was the perennial freshness of Miss Birdseye's faith that had had such a contagion for these modern maidens, the unquenched flame of her transcendentalism, the simplicity of her vision, the way in which, in spite of mistakes, deceptions, the changing fashions of reform . . . the only thing that was still actual for her was the elevation of the species by the reading of Emerson and the frequentation of Tremont Temple." Despite the little barb at the end, as if transcendentalists believed that huge social ills could be ameliorated by hearing lectures, this passage manages to convey both Olive's and Verena's deep love and respect for Miss Birdseye and the voice of a narrator who has found something worthy of praise in the "frumpy little missionary."[30]

If the novel at first reads the character of Miss Birdseye through the lens of skepticism about transcendental eccentricity, this passage suggests that the novel also links her to the past, and so reads her through the perspective of biography and reminiscence; hence the significance of Henry's term "ci-devant" (formerly) in his letter to William. Indeed, as the antebellum transcendentalists aged, some turned to writing their own reminiscences; as they died, they became the subjects of a growing series of biographies, memoirs, and editions. Their ideas and forms of literary expression may have fallen out of favor, and their reform crusades were either triumphant or passé, and for some their behavior and activism appeared as humorous and even endearing rather than outrageous or dangerous. But it would be a mistake to assume that the biographical turn represented only a diminution of transcendentalism, a way of enshrining and entombing the movement.

Rather, the biographical turn was more complex. In some hands, biographizing the transcendentalists became an effort to control and even rewrite the movement and its texts. For others, evoking the transcendentalists meant both the preservation and extension of their work and an affirmation of the writer's

own identity and commitments. Biography, at least since Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* if not James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, carries on a complicated and often contested relationship with its subject matter, and reveals the cultural assumptions of its writer and his/her times as much as it illuminates its subject. Writing the transcendentalists at the end of the nineteenth century was no less fraught.

The turn toward biographizing the transcendentalists began with the collective biography of Margaret Fuller edited by Emerson, William Henry Channing, and James Freeman Clarke shortly after Fuller's death in 1850. Frothingham's *Transcendentalism in New England* in 1876, Peabody's *Reminiscences of William Ellery Channing* in 1880 and her reminiscences of Emerson and Hawthorne in letters in the late 1870s and into the 1880s, biographies of Theodore Parker by John Weiss (1864) and John Chadwick (1900), and others emerged in the succeeding decades. A sequence of biographies and reminiscences of Emerson also began to appear in the last decades of the century, including volumes by George Willis Cooke, Moncure Conway, Alexander Ireland, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Elliot Cabot, and Edward Emerson.[31] But in the postwar years, few figures could match the obsessive energy of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, who established himself as the keeper of documents, biographer, and official interpreter of the movement.

For a time, Sanborn was an actor in the national drama of sectionalism and the antislavery movement. As one of the "Secret Six" clandestine supporters of revolutionary abolitionist John Brown, and as secretary of the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Society, he was perfectly positioned at the epicenter of radical resistance to slavery and ready to show transcendentalism's continuing relevance in a turbulent world. The years between 1857 and 1860 were crucial in shaping Sanborn's subsequent career. From his first meeting with John Brown, who had come to Concord in 1857 in search of funds from the Emigrant Aid Society for the defense of free-soil settlers in Kansas, Sanborn found himself closely involved in the era's tumultuous social and political upheaval. Through Sanborn, Brown met other reformers and members of the transcendentalist circle of writers and thinkers, including Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, and Ellery Channing, nephew of the illustrious Unitarian clergyman William Ellery Channing. Sanborn eventually traveled to Kansas, which had become the site of something like a proxy war between pro- and antislavery militants, with boxes of rifles, himself armed with a heavy revolver against groups of violent proslavery activists who traveled from Missouri in order to try to force the legalization of slavery in the state.

In October 1859, Brown's failed raid on the federal armory at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, electrified the nation and alarmed Brown's supporters, especially after the discovery of papers at Brown's hideout at the Kennedy farmhouse in Mary-

land that implicated the "Secret Six" conspirators who had aided him. In early 1860, the U.S. Senate formed an investigative committee headed by two Southern senators, James Mason and Jefferson Davis. Only Worcester clergyman and transcendentalist Thomas Wentworth Higginson defiantly proclaimed his connection with Brown. Others immediately distanced themselves from the whole operation, including Gerrit Smith, who had himself committed to the Utica Asylum for the Insane rather than face the Mason Committee. For his part, Sanborn fled to Canada, twice. But late in the evening of April 3, 1860, federal marshals, executing a writ of arrest issued by the Senate, caught up with him back in Concord and tried to force him outside into their wagon. Sanborn's sister Sarah Sanborn rushed outside and raised the alarm. Soon, First Church's bells began ringing out, and a crowd gathered, men and women fighting back against the officers, Sanborn himself resisting vigorously. Lawyer John Shepard Keyes applied to Judge Ebenezer Hoar for a writ of habeas corpus, and the marshals were forced to leave without their prisoner. So impressed were Sarah Sanborn's townspeople at the intensity of her resistance to her brother's seizure that they presented her with a Colt revolver.[32] With the outbreak of hostilities a year later, Frank Sanborn's treasonous aid of an antislavery radical came to be seen by many as premature patriotism.

This constellation of events—living and teaching in Concord, meeting the transcendentalist writers and thinkers toward the end of their most productive years, campaigning for Brown and fleeing the consequences of Brown's sedition, resisting arrest and later being spared testifying by the outbreak of war—shaped Sanborn's career from 1860 onward. Nothing could possibly match such experiences, with their heart-racing excitement and anxiety, filled with the sense of living at the leading edge of colossal change. Sanborn had come close to the great culture-shaping figures of his time, yet he was unable to reframe transcendentalist idealism and social radicalism for a new generation. Rather, Sanborn expended an enormous amount of energy defending his heroes, especially John Brown, through the long postwar decades, as facts about Brown's involvement in the murders of proslavery settlers on Potawatomie Creek in Kansas came to light.

Sanborn's output was truly prodigious, even if we exclude his journalism, essays, reviews, notices, reports, and weekly columns for the *Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican*. Counting the book-length volumes, Sanborn wrote two biographies of Emerson, an edition of the tributes to Emerson at the 1883 Concord School, two biographies and one reminiscence of Thoreau, a sketch of Bronson Alcott and his friends in England and at Fruitlands, a brief limited-edition reminiscence of Hawthorne, a two-volume *Life and Letters of John Brown*, a two-volume biography of Alcott (with one chapter by William Torrey Harris), an edition of

the poems of Ellery Channing, editions of Thoreau's letters and poems, his notorious edition of *Walden*, and his autobiography, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, also in two volumes. Sanborn was also deeply involved in the work of others, including providing advice to John Chadwick on his biography of Parker and even destroying the printer's plates of an earlier Parker biography by John Weiss which was, to Sanborn, unsatisfactory. Weiss's had been a "huge, futile biography,—full of good matter, but never really reaching the public, and with so many errors, both of omission and commission, that, when it came to be my property, I at once had the stereotype plates melted, so that it should not be reproduced. It is therefore out of print, and you can use its matter without scruple. Frothingham's better work is not so rich in matter, and is rather too formal and Bostonian in style. I own that, too, and you are welcome to take from it what you choose."[33]

Today's readers might turn to Sanborn because he knew his subjects in person and at his best he catches the flavor of their personalities. But his books are difficult for all but scholars, and even they find them hard going. His best anecdotes have long been extracted by better biographers. His penchant for long and tedious digressions and his sense of his own self-importance were noticed by reviewers and readers in his own time and since. "The criticism [of the nearly seven hundred pages in Sanborn's two-volume biography of Alcott] will not be diminished by the discovery in the book of many pages which would, among the world's people, be called padding," wrote one reviewer in 1893. Sanborn seemed unable, wrote another, to distinguish between anecdote and criticism. His 1882 biography of Thoreau gives us stories, but "as a vindication, a criticism, a eulogy, or a biography . . . in no one of these aspects is it a very successful literary performance."[34] He seemed to love best tracing family trees and pursuing local history. Sanborn's biographer, Benjamin Hickok, put it this way: "Sanborn is a rememberer of things past, a genealogist, a New England antiquarian, and a collector of material in general."[35] His collecting habit served successive editors and scholars well, although it also tended to make transcendentalism a regional, even a tribal, possession rather than a living tradition.

The most revealing examples of Sanborn's proprietary sense about the transcendentalists come from his editing practices. In 1894, Houghton, Mifflin published Sanborn's edition of *Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau* as a stand-alone volume and four months later as the eleventh volume of *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*. Although the *Nation*'s reviewer hailed this work as "a very real and palatable addition to the feast spread by Emerson [referring to Emerson's 1865 collection of Thoreau's letters] and the fresh dishes from Thoreau's larder which have been added thereunto," the reality was quite different.[36] Walter Harding demonstrated in 1951 that Sanborn had significantly altered many letters, misdated others, and misidentified references. He had, in Harding's memorable

words, "Sanbornized Thoreau."[37] For his part, Hickok concludes that "though Sanborn, in my opinion, wrote few quotable sentences after he left college, he had the supreme self-confidence that allowed him to rearrange the sentences and the sentence structure of one of the best sentence-writers in the English language."[38]

Fifteen years later, Sanborn launched into another mammoth editing project, an edition of *Walden* for the Bibliophile Society of Boston. St. Louis investor W. K. Bixby had come into possession of a box of Thoreau papers which he turned over to the Bibliophile Society, which in turn entrusted them to Sanborn. Sanborn took this miscellaneous collection as evidence of sections Thoreau intended to include in *Walden* but chose not to or was persuaded not to by his publishers. Armed with this conviction that he knew Thoreau's intentions, Sanborn added in this new material, often as footnotes, took material from the chapter "Economy" and transferred it to later chapters, and reversed the order of the first and second chapters. Many years later, Thoreau's editor Francis Allen sadly wrote, "I have the impression that there has been little demand for its [the 'Sanbornized' *Walden*] substitution for the book that Thoreau himself fathered. But it was a characteristic performance for Frank Sanborn. What delight he must have taken in improving on so great an author as Thoreau!"[39]

While Sanborn seems the most egregious in his desire to reshape transcendentalism's political and literary figures and texts to his own liking and to wrap himself in their reputation, other memoirists and biographers were more focused on showing transcendentalism's reach and impact. In several ways, Thomas Wentworth Higginson's recollections of the antebellum movement in *Cheerful Yesterdays* (1895) and *Part of a Man's Life* (1905) give the best sense of its range and vitality. In *Yesterdays*, Higginson reminds readers of the interactions among people closely associated with the movement and nontranscendentalists, like James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and John Greenleaf Whittier, who knew the transcendentalists and mingled with them in clubs and in the pages of journals. Higginson is also valuable for reminding readers of the political radicalism and particularly the antislavery activism that united transcendentalists and others in common cause. At the same time, "The Sunny Side of the Transcendental Movement" in *Part of Man's Life* conveys the sense of hope and possibility of change, the desire for "human flourishing," that infused the movement until, as Higginson puts it, "the great flood-tide of the civil war bore this all away, followed by the stupendous growth of a changed nation."[40]

These works of reminiscence and reconstruction return us to the third and last portrayal of Miss Birdseye in *The Bostonians*. Still pursuing Verena, Basil Ransom has tracked down Verena, Olive, Mary Prance, and Miss Birdseye in the Cape

Cod resort town of Marmion. Now in the last days of her life, Miss Birdseye believes that Basil's presence means that "Verena had drawn him in, had made him sympathise with the great reform and desire to work for it." Then, speaking to the whole group, Miss Birdseye says, "'You mustn't think there's no progress because you don't see it all right off; that's what I wanted to say. It isn't till you have gone a long way that you can feel what's been done. That's what I see when I look back from here; I see that the community wasn't half waked up when I was young.'" At which Verena bursts out, "'It is you that have waked it up more than any one else, and it's for that we honour you, Miss Birdseye! . . . If you were to live for a thousand years, you would think only of others—you would think only of helping on humanity. You are our heroine, you are our saint, and there has never been any one like you!'" Olive, understanding both the sincerity of Verena's tribute and the irony of Miss Birdseye's misunderstanding of Ransom's presence, rushes to Miss Birdseye's side, shrieking that she foresees only "shame and ruin."[41]

The first appearance of Miss Birdseye is given as satire bordering on ridicule, and the second as a more affectionate, even honorific portrayal, while this third version seems to combine both impulses. Her misunderstanding springs from a "misty earnestness" and a "benignant perversity" to think that Ransom might actually embrace feminism.[42] At the same time, in her self-giving activism, Miss Birdseye *was* heroic, the last link back to an era of "plain living and high thinking." If the first appearance links to the preference of a younger generation of urban elites for more scientific precision, a more rigorous sense of personality, behavior, and policy rather than the creatively unformed and always emergent sense of self championed by transcendentalists, the second and third appearances have a valedictory effect, as James's unnamed narrator ushers Miss Birdseye out of the novel and into what the novel imagines as an unrecoverable past. It makes a certain perverse sense, therefore, to turn again to the real-life Elizabeth Peabody and acknowledge that her influence was far from as faded as the novel suggests, and offer her the last word.

By the late 1880s, Peabody had outlived virtually all her contemporaries. She never wrote a complete version of her own memoirs. What we do have in her several accounts of earlier decades is not mere reminiscence, but vigorous efforts to connect the struggles and achievements of the 1830s and 1840s with the issues of the last decades of the century. Her 1880 biography of William Ellery Channing, for example, frames Channing's and her own deep concern with early childhood education in light of the work of Friedrich Froebel and the advent of the kindergarten.[43] Peabody's "Emerson as Preacher," part of Sanborn's 1884 collection *The Genius and Character of Emerson*, links Emerson's earliest American ancestor Peter Bulkeley with contemporary concerns about Native American

rights. According to Peabody, Bulkeley attempted to make "*concord*—which named the town—by a just purchase of land, and a Christian benevolence to them [native inhabitants] that was indeed not without parallel among the Independents."[44] She distinguishes between Bulkeley's Independents and the later "Puritans," whose hostility toward native people was based on a false biblical analogy between themselves as chosen people and native people as Canaanites. Whether or not she was right about the behavior of Concord's first European settlers, Peabody likely had in mind her own current involvement with the Paiutes in Nevada. The essay suggests she wished to bring to bear the historical record of Massachusetts settlement, the reputation of the Emersons, and the force of biblical scholarship to reach beyond a mere reminiscence of Emerson to comment on a current controversy.

Peabody's interest in continuities, the bridges she sought to build between early and late century, were not only memorial, the fruit of age looking back upon a long life. Rather, she vigorously participated in two movements that sprang from transcendentalist roots and grew in an altered climate: the Concord School of Philosophy and the kindergarten movement. Peabody was too ill to participate in the school in 1882, and often appeared to doze or wander during sessions in other years. Still, younger lecture-goers like Kate Douglas Wiggin recalled her presence with affection and vividness: "Her mind was a complete storehouse of fascinating and varied knowledge, and her memory endless."[45] Peabody was often in the thick of the discussions and presentations, offering talks on "Childhood" and "Emerson as Preacher" and a lecture on *Paradise Lost* which prompted "a severe tournament" of debate.[46] Perhaps, when the humorous anecdotes are set aside, Peabody's distinctive blend of intellectual rigor, female-centered education, and persistent transcendentalism will be seen as important contributions to the sessions.

It is undoubtedly the kindergarten movement that most fully demonstrated Peabody's ability to bring the causes and concerns of transcendentalism forward into the late decades of the nineteenth century. I have elsewhere described her crucial role in that movement: the way she synthesized Wordsworthian notions of the child's intuitive gifts and powers, biblical rhetoric, and the newer theories of organic developmentalism.[47] Like her approach to reminiscence, which was never merely nostalgia but mixed reflection with engagement in current debates, Peabody's crusade for the kindergarten attended both to its transcendentalist roots and to the cultural arguments of the 1870s. In "Kindergarten Culture," for example, written in 1870, she noted that the South under Reconstruction might avoid some of the difficulties of public education in the northeastern states by incorporating kindergartens in their plans.[48] In "The Relations between the Kindergarten and the So-Called Positive Philosophy," part of her extensive contribution to the August 1873 issue of *Kindergarten Messenger*, she stresses the

similarities between empiricism and the work of Friedrich Froebel. "Positive philosophers" and Froebel both root education in material reality, she writes, and both see education as fundamentally social rather than merely private.[49] For Peabody, "social" meant understanding the claims and values of family and community without sacrificing individual uniqueness to the demands of the group.

Peabody had an uneven relationship with the major reform movements of her own time. She was skeptical of the women's movement, unaware of protests about industrial labor, and uninvolved in antislavery efforts until the late 1850s. Like others in her circle, except for Margaret Fuller, she was dubious about European social theory and criticized the Fourierist turn at Brook Farm. What most troubled her were movements that recognized permanent divisions, structural antipathies, in society; what pleased her were examples of the notion of society as organism, its parts working together harmoniously.

Like other transcendentalists, Peabody believed in a shared human spiritual dimension, in the existence and power of intuition to discern truth, in education as a means for fusing intuition with knowledge of the external world, and in the possibility of more satisfying and productive human relations than had yet been accomplished. With George Ripley and others, she saw in the person of Jesus the most perfectly socialized being, one who was simultaneously in touch with his own inner worth and power and in perfect social relations with his disciples. Harmonious social life was required for true selfhood. Peabody's most elegantly written and compelling essay in her long career of writing, "A Glimpse of Christ's Idea of Society," links the Brook Farm community at West Roxbury, Massachusetts, to the immense task of social transformation that must begin, she argued, from an "unfolding of the individual man into every form of perfection."[50] To be clear: linking Peabody with turn-of-the-century reforms that emanated from Protestant denominations is not to claim that she embraced their theologies *tout court*. Rather, Peabody is a powerful example of the transcendentalist willingness to make use of Christian language and some social ideals to promote this-worldly welfare for those to whom it had been denied, without embracing Christianity's supernaturalist claims.

In the face of the social upheavals of the late nineteenth century—labor and class revolution, genocide of indigenous peoples, global imperialism, racial segregation and oppression—Peabody's calls for Christ's idea of society and individual human perfection may have seemed ludicrous, quaint, or dangerously naive. Yet the transformation of society along the lines of the New Testament, with the concomitant liberation of the individual, were far from goals unique to her, but were rather the objects of some radical Protestant reformers' efforts, both within and outside churchly institutions, at the turn of the twentieth century.

For most prosperous Americans in the late nineteenth century, Christianity in its familiar garb of Protestant denominationalism sanctified the operations of market capitalism and the opportunities afforded to a few to rise to material comfort and security. So great was "the American's basic contempt for poverty," as historian Sydney Ahlstrom puts it, that even liberal clergyman Henry Ward Beecher could argue that "looking comprehensively through city and town and village and country, the general truth will stand, that no man in this land suffers from poverty unless it be more than his fault—unless it be his *sin*."[51]

Church leaders who dissented from Beecher's "general truth," to which Massachusetts Episcopal bishop William Lawrence approvingly gave the term "the gospel of wealth," were always few in number and beleaguered in status. Washington Gladden, Francis Greenwood Peabody, and Josiah Strong all articulated the claim of a "social gospel," that Jesus had taught a radical *human* equality and had envisioned a transformed society of equal participants. The American communitarian movement, including Brook Farm, was never far from the minds of these advocates of the social gospel, which they blended with theological and social influences from England and Europe. From the 1880s through the 1930s, activists sought to fuse liberal Protestant belief with campaigns for social change and reform, ranging from Progressive-style demands for changes in specific laws to more sweeping challenges to the inequities brought about by capitalism. While turn-of-the-century reformers, including Christian socialists, used quantitative methods—polls, surveys, studies—made popular by the new social sciences, their vision of change drew a large part of its energy from transcendental idealism.

Baptist clergyman Walter Rauschenbusch brought together all the various strands of the social gospel movement: its distinctive biblical hermeneutic, its social theory, its preferred models from the past, and its embrace of American political ideals. Like Elizabeth Peabody, Rauschenbusch saw in social change the very core of the religious life, the two movements indistinguishable. Rauschenbusch's key idea was that of the "Kingdom of God on earth," and his most popular book was *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, published in 1907. There he argues that the ethics of socialism and the faith of the New Testament are deeply compatible, tracing that affinity from the early church through the communitarian movements of the nineteenth century. Besides Rauschenbusch, others not so intimately linked with institutional religion also drew their inspiration for social change from what might be called Peabodian transcendentalism. Edward Bellamy was inspired by an eclectic mix of Christian liberalism, transcendentalism, and the work of Auguste Comte to shape a form of socialism he called "a religion of solidarity." Bellamy's most famous contribution to the debate over the social implications of industrial capitalism was his novel *Looking Backward* (1888), a

portrait of a thoroughly socialized America in 2000. William Dean Howells likewise embraced a version of Christian socialism after he read Tolstoy. But his critique of American culture in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890) and *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894) equally derive from his youthful passion for the transcendentalists and his admiration for antebellum social reform.

Perhaps no figure more fully represents both the continuation and the refinement of the Peabodian impetus in transcendentalism than reformer, educator, and public servant Jane Addams. Born in Cedarville, Illinois, in 1860 into a family that valued education and public service, Addams graduated from Rockford Female Seminary (later Rockford College) in 1880. While at Rockford, Jane heard Bronson Alcott lecture, "and we were inexpressibly scornful of our younger fellow-students who cared for him merely on the basis of his grandfatherly relation to 'Little Women.' I recall cleaning the clay of the unpaved streets off his heavy cloth overshoes in a state of ecstatic energy."[52] Although financially comfortable (unlike Peabody, or Alcott until Louisa Alcott's publishing successes), Addams struggled with the question of vocation, unwilling to lapse into the genteel lifestyle of travel and consumerism that marked many upper-middle-class women of the late nineteenth century. Instead, her European travels ignited a desire to confront questions of class and labor, but to do so within the context of women, family, children, and home. In 1889, Addams and Ellen Gates Starr opened Hull House in Chicago, a settlement house that offered classes, day care, and an atmosphere of welcome for the thousands of recent immigrants in its Near West Side neighborhood.

Much as recent scholarship on the Peabody sisters has sought to dispel half-truths and correct dismissive conclusions, so has recent work on Jane Addams sought to correct and enhance her legacy. Some readers have looked at the sisters and at Addams through the lens of contemporary feminism and radical movements for social change and have found them wanting. Some have found Addams a well-meaning do-gooder, others see in her reforms efforts to soften class conflict and manage the masses. But as Jean Bethke Elshtain argues, Addams sought to use the language of domesticity, family, and education as a means of championing basic principles of democracy. For her, private claims of family responsibility or personal advancement needed to be balanced against the equally powerful claims of society, particularly of those less able to cope in modern urban culture.[53]

Parallels in the external facts of Peabody's and Addams's careers are striking enough—unmarried, highly educated, devoted to lives of service, often involved in large public controversies and themselves controversial, often dismissed as eccentric and naïve. Equally striking are Addams's references to the influence of transcendentalism. In "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements," for ex-

ample, Addams argues that modern society owes to its children more education than is typically provided in public schools. "The dream of transcendentalists that each New England village would be a university, that every child taken from the common school would be put into definite lines of study and mental development, had its unfulfilled beginning in the village lyceum and lecture courses, and has its feeble representative now in the multitude of clubs for study which are so sadly restricted to educators, to the leisure class, or only to the advanced and progressive wage-workers."[54]

Like Peabody, Addams saw education as a means of bringing out qualities which already exist in the child or adult, whether intuitively or as folk knowledge, and blending them with new insight and experience. In this same essay, she refers to Friedrich Froebel's notion that education is "deliverance." Like Froebel's American champion Elizabeth Peabody, Addams saw "deliverance" as meaning both "deliverance *of*" or "offering *of*" the preexisting gifts of the self, and "deliverance *from*" "all constraint and rigidity," particularly from the egotism that Peabody saw as the root of evil.[55] Much as Peabody saw in the kindergarten, so Addams saw in settlement house work an outlet for the altruistic impulses of young people, particularly privileged young women.

Compelling as these parallels may be, it is equally true that Addams represents an extension of Peabodian transcendentalism, not its duplication. Peabody lived in a world rooted in eighteenth-century politics and loyalties, and her career unfolded in largely privileged (though often financially straitened) circumstances of private education, multigenerational families, and wealthy patrons. Addams inhabited the urban/industrial nexus of the early twentieth century, with its overlapping and daunting challenges of class conflict, industrial labor, slums and squalor, immigration, gendered inequality, and political indifference and corruption. What draws these two women together is the belief that individual change and social change are not sequential or separated, but are simultaneous and interactive. What Peabody said of Froebel could just as easily be said of her own pedagogy: "Thus, without taking the child out of his childish spontaneity and innocence, Froebel would make him a kind, intelligent, artistic, moral being, harmonizing the play of will, heart, and mind from the very beginning of life into a veritable image of the creativeness of God."[56] In an immensely more complex social world, Addams envisions the same simultaneity: "If you have heard a thousand voices singing in the Hallelujah Chorus in Handel's 'Messiah,' you have found that the leading voices could still be distinguished, but that the differences of training and cultivation between them and the voices of the chorus were lost in the unity of purpose and the fact that they were all human voices lifted by a high motive."[57]

FOUR } *Charles Ives: Sound*

—interval from felt
to string a struck
ear's the soul's seat
set ringing —easy

now song has a few rights can break
a law if it likes if our ear veers hymnward
it won't wear no ribbon to match its voice

—intellect is never
a whole soul
finds things there

—must a song always
be a song

some
in this book can't be sung

—BRIAN TEARE, "Hello (*Ives*)"

Secularity in the Euro-American transcendentalist version is not a process of subtraction, taking away the religious residue and embracing the worldly core; it is not an inevitable process of desacralizing that accompanies urban and industrial/postindustrial life; it is not universally hailed as liberation from clerical oppression. Rather, secularity involves a complicated dialectic between the claims of present material existence, especially the drive for human fulfillment in the here and now, and the competing sense that there are other authoritative claims than those deriving from human beings, other sources of insight or inspiration than those leading to human "happiness." Another way to say this is to observe that secularity radically queries both sides of this argument, "fragilizes each context," as Charles Taylor puts it.[1] The worldly experience in modern and contemporary western cultures is object-oriented, spread out, richly complicated, and fragmented. The otherworldly experience often drives toward coherence and a search for the simplicity and centeredness sometimes, though not universally, found in religious traditions. In this broad-brush way of

thinking, the experience of fragmentation pushes against the hunger for coherence, which pushes back. This dialectic is, again in Taylor's understanding, what constitutes the secular age.

Transcendentalism is an early experience of secularity understood this way: not simply as the evolution of a liberal spirituality out of the seedbed of liberal Protestantism, but as an expression of the desire for human flourishing in this world, pursued in a series of personal, social, and aesthetic experiments. These experiments sought to undermine remaining claims for Christianity's version of supernatural truth, to challenge conventional forms of education and family life, to promote social reform, and to innovate new ways of speaking and writing. In these senses, transcendentalists sought to make sense of an increasingly fragmented and disjointed early-industrial society and democratic culture by playing, as it were, with its pieces. At the same time, they were unwilling to give up all reference to religious (specifically, liberal Protestant Christian) language and references, and in fact embodied these in their essays, letters, and conversations. More deeply, transcendentalists were wedded to the notion that there existed a ground-plan, a moral order, in the cosmos, that we discern intuitively, often in natural environments, and used their lingering religious/spiritual language to express that deep belief. So we might understand secularity not only as the interplay of worldly/human and otherworldly claims, but as the interplay of fragmentation and nostalgia.

Often understood as a regressive and defensive mechanism associated with a longing for a time or place from the past and a sense of displacement from the present, nostalgia may also be understood less judgmentally as "essentially normal unless it dominates the psychic economy," as psychologist Daniel Werman proposes. Werman distinguishes between fantasy, which is a "substitute for the fulfillment, in the present, of a wish," and nostalgia, which is "an experience of the past that is recalled, normally or pathologically, for itself."[2] Nostalgia, in fact, can be a principal source of aestheticized or aestheticizing production, perhaps most famously employed in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. In Charles Ives's music, the inclusion of snatches of hymn tunes and marches can readily be seen as nostalgic, recollecting a real or imagined time of cultural cohesion, of sets of values which have, in the present time of composition and/or the present time of listening, gone missing. Ives (1874–1954) drew upon a rich knowledge and sense of the past, and few creative figures in the early twentieth-century United States were as attuned to the influence of transcendentalism. He grasped the competing claims of fissure and unity in the nation and its history and created some of the most challenging and original music in the Western canon.

At Yale in the 1890s, everybody had nicknames, even faculty members, although theirs were not usually used to their faces. William Lyon Phelps, Charlie Ives's

English professor, was an exception who did not mind if his students called him "Billy," and he quickly became Billy Phelps during his long career in New Haven. Two of Ives's nicknames are more illuminating: "Dasher" and "Lemuel." "Dasher" suggests something about Ives that was quite in line with the high spirits and male camaraderie that dominated social life at Yale at the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, a ruling ethos that elevated athletics and the promise of financial success above other forms of identity or achievement.[3] This was the world of *Stover at Yale* (1911), the world Ives celebrated in his march, "Calcium Light Night," in his school chants and his glee-club settings. "Lemuel," on the other hand, has a biblical, perhaps provincial sound. As a nickname, its distancing effect, despite Ives's enthusiastic participation in college life, suggests recognition of something private, awkward, even antisocial about the man. Already, for Ives this was the world of composition, of dissonance and song fragments, of "great human passions . . . too deep for animate expression," of the profound influence of his bandleader father, George, whose music nonetheless seemed to him too crudely popular, compared to Charlie's influential and socially prominent Yale professor of music, Horatio Parker.[4]

These two nicknames seem uncannily accurate in conveying the coexisting and often competing forces that characterized Charles Ives's life and shaped his art. These layered influences would follow him throughout his musically productive years and into the long afterlife of his evolving critical reputation: small-town cohesion and urban anonymity; nineteenth-century harmony and twentieth-century dissonance; American vernacular music and European musical traditions; male and female gendered identities; religious community and secular culture. All these and others marked Ives's life to an intense degree. In his last great period of composition, from 1908 to 1918, Ives was able to weave together these frequently warring strands in his psychic, relational, and cultural life to write his most memorable pieces of music and prose: the Second Piano Sonata (*Concord* Sonata), *Essays before a Sonata*, the Fourth Symphony, the two string quartets, *Three Places in New England*, the Second, Third, and Fourth Violin Sonatas, and *The Unanswered Question*. Ives's genius lay in his extraordinary capacity to weave together the diverse strands of music to which he had been exposed without creating hierarchies of style, tradition, or influence. His musical and cultural worlds always strained at each other, creating an ongoing tension that is the very ground of his musical style. Early and late in Ives's career, these tensions would both enable his distinctive music and generate crises in his personal and professional life: in 1902 when he gave up music as a career and turned to the insurance business, in 1906 and 1918 when he suffered from debilitating physical and mental strain, and then again in the early 1920s when his composing life came to an end.

Ives's fellow New Englander, Henry Adams, also keenly felt the latent or real conflicts in the people, places, and institutions that shaped his life. "The chief

charm of New England was harshness of contrasts and extremes of sensibility," he wrote in *The Education of Henry Adams*. "Town was restraint, law, unity. Country, only seven miles away, was liberty, diversity, outlawry, the endless delight of mere sense impressions given by nature for nothing, and breathed by boys without knowing it."[5] Adams framed these conflicts as dualisms, which is undoubtedly the more dramatic way to shape a narrative, but Ives's music and prose show a different approach: for him, as for the antebellum transcendentalists, the modern world was an array of fragments. The challenge was to pick up those fragments and assemble them into something interesting, maybe useful, something (an art form, a social institution, a domestic arrangement) that corresponded to a vision of the truth. Unlike Adams's aesthetically satisfying dichotomies, Ives's creative world was messy and multifarious, with order brought to it only through enormous effort and then only temporarily. The resulting music is itself fragmented, fluid, mobile, unfinished, and continually open to argument and revision by successive generations of performers, critics, musicologists, historians, and listeners.

For Ives, as for Adams, moments of harmony and synthesis in personal life as in the public domain were fleeting, fragmentary, and precious, hard-won in the face of conflicting traditions, values, and influences. Ives's efforts to achieve "concord" opened him to the influence of the Concord writers, especially Emerson and Thoreau, to a fledgling appreciation of the transcendentalist circle of which they were a part, and to a largely imagined sense of what antebellum transcendentalism involved. The result, especially the Second Piano Sonata and *Essays before a Sonata*, emerged into a world already thinking about transcendentalism in some particular ways. Musically and verbally, Ives's projects both duplicated and challenged those existing cultural understandings. Eventually, when the *Concord* Sonata was played in New York City in its entirety for the first time in 1939, its music and its historical references were understood in yet other national and global contexts.

Danbury, Connecticut, in the 1870s and 1880s was a near-perfect example of a community riven by competing and overlapping cultural values and social practices, whose divisions were papered over by the continuing domination of a few leading families such as the Iveses. Charles's family included bankers, lawyers, and prominent businessmen. The antebellum small town, with its village green and Yankee cohesiveness, grew steadily in the postwar years with the growth of the hat manufacturing industry. A new social class of workers moved to town in the years around Charles's birth, and the old elite struggled to maintain its control over local politics. As a tool in this struggle, New England literary culture became, for many in Ives's family and class, a way of asserting superiority. Family legend has it that Emerson and James Russell Lowell stayed with Ives's

uncle Joseph Moss Ives when they visited Danbury during a lecture tour in 1859; Uncle Joe, it was said, met the two literati while visiting in Boston and invited them to his home.[6] Charles himself recorded in one of the texts collected in *Memos* that his grandmother Sarah Hotchkiss Wilcox Ives was an ardent reader of "the transcendentalists," though who or what she read beyond Emerson's essays Ives does not say. Responding to a question from Ives cataloguer and preeminent pianist John Kirkpatrick, Ives recalled a family story that Grandmother Ives knew the essay "New England Reformers" by heart, but was shocked that Emerson's lecture was not a duplicate of the essay but rather an improvisation on its theme.[7] Perhaps in a kind of homage to the writer who figures prominently in Ives's *Essays* and who frequently deviated from his printed texts, Ives was famous for never playing the same piece of his music the same way twice.[8]

For some middle-class Americans, hosting such distinguished visitors and having their works on one's shelf were signs of "culture," which also included reading, journal-keeping, Sunday worship, and indoor music. This was one stream of Ives's musical influence, a world of piano, organ, choirs, and ensembles, of recitals and church services, a world of European music adapted and simplified for American tastes and training, and a world in which women could exert influence and direction. Ives absorbed this influence, becoming a talented church organist by his teens and continuing to play during his undergraduate years at Yale. He reached beyond the local training and venues available to him in Danbury and refined his compositional technique in studying with Parker in New Haven.

Concentrating in his young life the layered social and cultural practices in Danbury in the 1870s and 1880s, Charlie Ives succeeded at this indoor culture but also craved other worlds.[9] He became an ace baseball player, roamed the woods and meadows outside of Danbury with his brother Moss, and soaked up the musical world of his father George, the band leader. The band seemed to be everything the indoor life was not: it was all men, musical amateurs of varying degrees of ability; it played marches, mostly, but sometimes dance music; it played outdoors at camp-meeting revivals and on the bandstand on the town green; it appealed to working people and young people, who could jiggle and move and stomp outdoors to the simple rhythms and melodies, rather than sit still indoors.

An easy but misleading view of George Ives, one that his son promoted in the texts in *Memos*, poses George's music and his influence on one side of an unbridgeable divide, with the European tradition embodied by Horatio Parker on the other. This view distorts George's musical sophistication, Charles's indebtedness to Parker and European music, and Charles's genius. Restless and inventive, George taught his son the music of J. S. Bach and lessons in harmony and counterpoint, and experimented with arrangements, dissonances, and tone

clusters. He was fascinated by quarter tones, working out the intervals with a slide cornet or with glasses filled to various levels to achieve the pitches unavailable on a "tempered" instrument like the piano. George encouraged his son to "thump" percussively on the lower registers of the piano, imitating drumbeats rather than any particular notes, and to sing a tune in one key while playing the accompaniment in another.[10] Most of all, George conveyed to his son a sense of musical curiosity, a willingness to experiment: "Father used to say, 'If you know how to write a fugue the right way *well*, then I'm willing to have you try the wrong way—*well*. But you've got to know what [you're doing] and why you're doing it.' It was his willingness to have boys think for themselves—within reason—that I looked back on later as quite remarkable, but it didn't seem [so] to me then as a boy. I had to practice right and know my lesson first, then he was willing to let us roam a little for fun. He somehow kept us in a good balance. It was good for our minds and our ears."[11]

It was not that formal musical training was wrong or irrelevant. Indeed, before Horatio Parker, this is exactly what George Ives provided his son. It was the transformation of education into conventionality that Ives found repulsive, that drew out his Yankee venom and sarcasm. In a passage from *Memos* that began as a transcription of one of George's letters but shifted into Charles's own voice, he writes: "I am fully convinced [that], if music be not allowed to grow, if it's denied the privilege of evolution that all other arts and life have . . . then music, before many years, cannot be composed—everything will be used up—endless repetitions of static melodies, harmonies, resolutions, and metres—and music as a creative art will die—for to compose will be but to manufacture conventionalized MUSH—and that's about what student composers are being taught to do."[12]

Between his graduation from Yale College in 1898 and the publication of the *Concord* Sonata and *Essays before a Sonata* in 1920, Ives wrote an astonishing amount of music: songs for solo and for ensemble voices, sonatas for violin and for piano, orchestral overtures, sketches, tone poems, symphonies. Some of these, like the *Concord*, "The Unanswered Question," and the Fourth Symphony have become part of the standard repertory. While still at Yale, Ives played the organ on Sundays in Center Church on the New Haven Green, composed symphonies and settings of psalms, and, in the same years, wrote marches, songs, glees, and ditties of all kinds for the enjoyment of his fraternity brothers and friends.

In his reminiscent *Memos*, Ives downplayed Parker's influence, but it makes more sense to see Parker as smoothing out Ives's small-town background and exposing him to even more music and more technique than his gifted father had provided. If grades are any indication of interest (which is not always the case,

of course), then Ives's solid Bs in Parker's courses suggest more attention than do the Ds in most others. His classmate Julien Ripley recalled that Ives was "a little casual about some of his studies."[13] Still, this is not to say that George Ives's influence and Horatio Parker's influence on Charles were equivalent. George championed a participatory music, while Parker clearly represented the concert-hall, European tradition that privileged some music over other music.

But having a unique musical education at home and at college and making a successful career in music are two different things. After graduation, Ives moved to New York City and lived with a variable group of Yale graduates in a rooming house on West 58th Street. Ives became organist at a church in Bloomfield, New Jersey, and then at Central Presbyterian Church on 57th Street between Broadway and 7th Avenue. It was there that Ives's cantata *The Celestial Country* was performed in 1902. Reviews were guarded and mixed, and Ives took this modest reception as a rejection. He resigned abruptly from Central Presbyterian, and from that moment on never held another professional musical position. But Ives's composing career skyrocketed in these same years, early in the new century, as did his income from his new profession as a manager in life insurance.

In 1908 Ives married Harmony Twichell, sister of his college friend David. Harmony and Charles's honeymoon trip included a visit to Concord, Massachusetts, with a return visit in 1916. In 1911, Ives recalled much later, he got the idea for a "Concord Sonata" while at Pell Jones's resort in the Adirondacks. In the early years of the new century, Ives had gotten into what he called the "overture habit," a project to write a series of musical sketches representing literary figures, including Walt Whitman, Robert Browning, and Henry Ward Beecher. In 1907 he worked on an *Emerson* Overture or *Emerson* Concerto, parts of which eventually found their way into the "Emerson" movement of the *Concord* Sonata, completed, as Ives recalled, in the summer of 1912. The year before, Ives had completed the "Hawthorne" section, and in 1915 he would complete "The Alcotts" and "Thoreau" sections.[14]

Ives now turned to writing the prose that would accompany the completed sonata. *Essays before a Sonata*, published in 1920, consists of a prologue, an epilogue, and essays titled "Emerson," "Hawthorne," "'The Alcotts,'" and "Thoreau." He already had some familiarity with the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, but in early 1919 reread the first and second series of Emerson's essays and *Walden* during a stay in Asheville, North Carolina, as he recovered from a heart attack suffered in October 1918.[15] In short, Ives wrote the music first, and then found in the nineteenth-century writers a tradition at hand, one that had been vaguely already there in New England parlor culture and briefly in Phelps's Yale classroom, but now vigorously, robustly there, as a confirmation of what Ives had already intuited and created.

The *Concord* Sonata and the book of essays take us directly into the question of Ives's understanding and deployment of transcendentalism. A prodigious amount of scholarship has been expended on these twinned works, probably more than on any other work by Ives or any other American composer. The alignment of music and prose raises fascinating and troubling questions about musical and nonmusical forms of expression. Ives's choice of topic—his naming of the movements and his composition of the essays—brings into the conversation equally thorny issues of literary and cultural influence. For some, Ives had always been a transcendentalist of some sort, with family connections to Emerson and more recent affinities, via the Twichells, with the liberal theology of Horace Bushnell. For others, Ives's "transcendentalism" was of more recent vintage, a kind of happy discovery of a homegrown tradition that helped him articulate the path (intellectually and personally) on which he was already treading. For those readers/listeners, Ives is as much rooted in the European musical tradition as in the American, and is a canny marketer of his own work, even though he composed in isolation and no composition of his was performed except at his own instigation between 1902 and 1921. In this retelling, Ives emerges as a gifted composer who found confirmation of his own transcendentalist tendencies in the antebellum literary and cultural movement, blending its insights, as he understood them, with other familial, cultural, and regional influences.

In one sense, Ives had no more claim to deep knowledge of the figures of American transcendentalism than most native-born residents of New England in the last half of the nineteenth century. The facts that his grandmother was a reader, like many others, of Emerson's essays, and that Uncle Joe had met the Concordian on the streets of Boston were not strikingly unusual. At Yale, Charlie, along with many other classmates, read Emerson with Billy Phelps in a course on American literature of the previous one hundred years. Phelps preferred Emerson's poetry, but it is clear from the "Emerson" essay that Ives had read both Emerson's prose and poetry. It may well be that Ives's greater interest in the New England writers was largely the product of Harmony's direction of his life, away from his earlier circle of rowdy friends toward a more intensely couple-oriented daily life, and toward readings of her choice and receiving her encouragement.[16]

Whatever the cause, Ives read and reread the mid-nineteenth-century writers of the Northeast—Emerson, Thoreau, "and that whole New England school of writers," as Louis Untermeyer put it. He read those writers through the lenses of his culture's turn-of-the-century understandings about its own past, which included a limited understanding of transcendentalism. *Essays* sometimes echoes those culturally inflected notions of transcendentalism, or, as in the case of the Thoreau essay, tries to rescue a figure from a damaging stereotype. At other mo-

ments, Ives read these writers more individually, more eccentrically. He read for what he could get from them, a confirmation of his own compositional directions, a sense of comfort or reassurance in his relative musical isolation. As Untermeyer described Ives's literary borrowing from Emerson and, by extension, from the others as well, "he needed the thing that Emerson gave him, the thing which was both beautiful to listen to, beautiful to think about, and a kind of moral lesson." Biographer Jan Swafford makes a similar point about *Essays*: "Despite a measure of rambling and rant and confusion, in those pages lie not only the rationale of the *Concord Sonata*, but an unprecedented philosophical and spiritual credo by a composer of major importance."[17]

When Charles Ives was born in 1874, a few of the antebellum transcendentalists were still living—Emerson, Alcott, Peabody, Caroline Dall—as were a larger number of those who had come more lately to the movement, including Sanborn, Samuel Johnson, Frothingham, and Cheney. In some circles, mention of transcendentalism could still cause furrowed brows and clenched teeth or amused smiles, bringing memories of religious and social radicalism and eccentric personal behavior. Theodore Parker's challenge to his fellow Unitarians to give up their lingering beliefs in supernaturalism and Christian distinctiveness as a world religion inspired a new generation of clergy and theologians to form the Free Religion movement in the late 1860s. That move promptly brought charges of infidelity upon their heads, in a startling echo of similar charges brought against transcendentalists in the wake of Emerson's 1838 "Divinity School Address." Transcendentalism was still controversial, as well, at the Concord School of Philosophy in the late 1870s and early 1880s, when the very presence of its aged leaders at some of the sessions was enough to generate scornful or amused mention of Brook Farm and Fruitlands.

At the same time, transcendentalism was diffusing into middle-class liberal culture, inspiring some postwar feminists and eventually Progressive-era reformers like Jane Addams. Transcendentalism lived on in the form of reminiscence and biography, where writing itself served to link the antebellum figures and movement with postwar interpreters. For many other middle-class white liberal readers, transcendentalism was somewhere in the cultural background, a vague antecedent to their tenets about the goodness of human nature, the presence of the divine in nature, and the universality of religious beliefs. In an era exhausted by war and determined to get on with reunion and national expansion, the distinctive radicalism of transcendentalism seemed less applicable to new problems. The context that the movement provided for writers and thinkers like Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne had faded. It became much easier to install them in an American literary pantheon once their disturbing colleagues had been sidelined and their own cultural criticism diminished.

No reputation illustrated this gradual shift from cultural margins to center more fully than Emerson's, probably because he was considered, rightly or not, the leader and fountainhead of the prewar movement. A cultural outlaw in the 1830s and early 1840s, author of the provocative book *Nature* and the incendiary "Divinity School Address," Emerson had become, in the last decades of his life and after, a household god for many Americans. His lecture tours in the late 1860s and into the 1870s brought him new financial security, as did steady sales of his volumes of collected essays. Even though Emerson continued to pose hard questions for his postwar audiences, the gentility of his manner and the complexity of his thought softened those questions considerably.[18] Most of all, Emerson was admired for his character, now neatly separated from his thought or forms of expression. In Oliver Wendell Holmes's best-selling 1884 biography, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, the Concordian was celebrated as living "in the highest atmosphere of thought . . . always in the presence of the infinite . . . [and revealing] the same serene, high, pure intelligence and moral nature."[19]

Other figures suffered the same or a similar fate. After hearing her husband read aloud the last pages of *The Scarlet Letter*, Sophia Peabody Hawthorne had gone to bed with a "grievous headache," but by the 1870s and 1880s Nathaniel Hawthorne had become an American standard, sometimes read and more often praised as the country's answer to Thackeray and Dickens.[20] Bronson Alcott, no longer ridiculed for his radical pedagogy, had become the "father of *Little Women*," secure in his daughter's reputation and wealth. These names had become synonymous not just with the poems, essays, short stories, and novels written by these individuals (or their offspring), but, more importantly, with a shared sense of national cultural achievement. Less visible were the more provocative and experimental aspects of the transcendentalist movement: Temple School, Brook Farm, Fruitlands, West Street Bookshop, the *Dial*, Fuller's and Alcott's "conversations," the movement's embrace of abolitionism. For readers, especially, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, simply having volumes of Emerson and Hawthorne on one's shelves, sometimes read, more often not, was a sign of status, an indication of membership in the educated upper-middle class. Emerson and Hawthorne, together with the Fireside Poets William Cullen Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, and James Russell Lowell, were seen to project a kind of moral uplift, a quality of cultural "tone" meant to distinguish admirers from the unruly classes beneath and around them.

Still, as David Paul has pointed out, two groups of critics were focusing attention on the American transcendentalists in the first decades of the twentieth century, and both were finding them sorely wanting, though for different reasons.[21] On the one hand, university critics like Paul Elmer More and Irving Bab-

bitt found in the transcendentalists and particularly in Emerson a dangerous preference for intuition. Transcendentalists had all agreed with Coleridge that the power of intuition or imagination, which all people possess natively, was able to perceive truths that rationality was unable to apprehend. For the New Humanists, as they came to be called, this claim was a deathblow against civilization and restraint. There is no evidence that Ives read any of these critics; had he read them, we can imagine the snorts of dismissal and invective that Ives the democrat would have launched against them.

The second group, Paul notes, were members of the literary circle known as Young Americans. They too reexamined the nineteenth-century literary heritage and found it lacking, though for different reasons. While the New Humanists recoiled at the messy democratic possibilities of trusting the inherent insights of the uneducated masses (which they thought would be the consequence of transcendentalism), the Young Americans saw transcendentalism as a precursor of the vapid, airy, genteel writing and philosophizing that passed for high culture by the early twentieth century. In *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915), the young Van Wyck Brooks was particularly caustic about the transcendentalists:

> One finds it impossible to approach the question of Transcendentalism—the thing itself, and Emerson, Margaret Fuller, the Dial, Brook Farm, and all the other permutations and combinations of it—without first of all expelling a persistent spleen, and then submitting oneself to long explanations. So much truth, so much talent, so much of the American character is involved in that queer miasmatical group of lunar phenomena, in which philosophy, self-culture, politics, art, social reform, and religion were all mixed up and all felt to be, in some vague way, the same thing. . . . It is plain enough that the Transcendentalists had no sense of the relationship that exists between theory and practice, between the abstract and the concrete.[22]

Given that Brooks and his Young American colleagues Randolph Bourne, Waldo Frank, and others were among the keenest critics of American literature and culture in the first decades of the new century, it is all the more remarkable that Ives, apparently without knowing them, should have pushed back against the very criticism they launched. For Ives the culture critic, the transcendentalists were prophetic in championing democratic individuality; for Ives the musician and composer, their engagement with the raw materials of their society (rather than a flight from those materials) was the ground of their thought, as it was of his own art. It is certainly true that his preference was always for a small-town model of American democracy. But he was also an urban dweller, a lover of the raucous ragtime and street scenes of New York, and not unaware of the new America of immigrants and tenements.

So when Charles Ives set to work writing *Essays before a Sonata*, he brought to bear not just his own reading of nineteenth-century writers, nor just his memories of a Yale classroom twenty years earlier, nor the sonata's sections and the experience of having composed them. He brought the selectively edited, sometimes repressed, but always lingering presence of transcendentalism. The essays tell us relatively little about transcendentalism, or about Concord, or about these four writers, and what they do tell us is sometimes wrong or misleading. They are, at root, intensely personal ways for Ives to use the nineteenth-century writers as occasions to explain and defend his approach to composition, indeed his entire worldview. As Swafford puts it, the work's "main purpose is to tell us about Ives in general and the *Concord* [Sonata] in particular, and they do that very well."[23] Linking the writers together even loosely under the rubric of transcendentalism encouraged Ives to think about their commonalities, and allows us to see the aesthetic strategies and frames of mind he shared with them. As if to reinforce the point that he understood these writers and transcendentalism eccentrically and selectively, Ives wrote in the 1930s that he no longer agreed with some of the ideas he had championed in *Essays*.[24] Ives took what he needed from the available materials, labeled them inaccurately or incompletely, deemed what he had come across to be helpful for his own self-understanding, and proceeded to write his apologia.

The essays where Ives's lacunae are most obvious are devoted to the Alcotts and Hawthorne. There is no evidence, as J. Peter Burkholder notes, that Ives read anything Bronson Alcott wrote, or writings of any of the other figures associated with the antebellum movement except those by Emerson, Hawthorne, or Thoreau.[25] By the turn of the century, Bronson Alcott, once a central and highly controversial member of the transcendentalist circle, had nearly dropped off the cultural map, remembered primarily as the father of Louisa May and "Father" in *Little Women*. Alcott had spent the last years of his life organizing the Concord School of Philosophy and sparring with the St. Louis Hegelians, a group of German-American philosophers who found his homegrown idealism illogical and unsystematic compared to their relentless unfolding of the Hegelian dialectic. In an age dominated by empirical explanations and technological advances, idealism had steadily retreated inside the walls of academia and the confines of evangelical religion. Long forgotten was his radical pedagogy at schools in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and, most famously, at Temple School in Boston. Instead, "The Alcotts" is a sentimental portrait of middle-class domesticity—little Beth playing Scotch airs and snatches of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony on Sophia Thoreau's piano, the family amusing itself with homemade pleasures, with examples drawn almost exclusively from *Little Women*—much at odds with the circumstances of the hard-pressed Alcott family in real-life Boston and Concord, but resonant with Ives's own idealized portrait of his own New England childhood.

Still, there is a breakthrough moment. In an essay that can make no claim for historical accuracy or any real extension of understanding of the Alcotts, Ives saw something in Concord's "common virtue," as he called it, that reminded him of Danbury and brought those memories forward. He understood this shared value as "a common interest in common things and common men," and elsewhere "a common sentiment." By "common" he likely meant not ordinary or undistinguished, but "shared," even universal. This was the typical meaning attached to "common" in the eighteenth century, and can be seen in the title of Thomas Paine's influential pamphlet *Common Sense*: not uneducated understanding, but widely experienced sense, the sense that is common to all. Hence Concord's "common virtue" is communal virtue. We see the best example of such virtue in the most historically accurate episode in this brief chapter, Ives's account of Bronson Alcott's brave participation in the failed effort in 1854 to rescue runaway slave Anthony Burns from the Boston jail, where he awaited return to his Southern owner. "So it seems that his idealism had some substantial virtues, even if he couldn't make a living."[26] We may hear a faint echo of George Ives's equally virtuous impracticality in this celebration of Alcott.

Ives seems suddenly to have come upon this insight into transcendentalism all by himself, an insight that contradicts the typical cultural reduction of transcendentalism to Concord, and Concord to two or three writers with a few secondary figures. Transcendentalism was not only or even principally about solitude. This is a misunderstanding that comes with confusing transcendentalism with Thoreau and equating Thoreau to an aversion to company. Ives, on the other hand, saw in Concord a collective enterprise, a shared experience that was miniaturized in the Alcott family. It is worth looking again at the familiar lines at the end of "The Alcotts" to see how Ives grasps this connection: "All around you, under the Concord sky, there still floats the influence of that human-faith-melody—transcendent and sentimental enough for the enthusiast or the cynic, respectively—reflecting an innate hope, a common interest in common things and common men—a tune the Concord bards are ever playing while they pound away at the immensities with a Beethoven-like sublimity, and with, may we say, a vehemence and perseverance, for that part of greatness is not so difficult to emulate."[27]

The "common interest in common things" is simultaneous with "the immensities," Ives proposes. Seeing "common" as meaning "widely shared," we may come away with a sense that individual genius is not so much distinguished from the collective genius as coexisting with it, and indeed that genius is not the province of the few but the inherent possibility of all.

Still, the fictional Beth March and the real-life Alcotts were gone, Concord had become a tourist attraction, Danbury an industrial city. What Ives projects as a moment of communal/familial unity has shifted and changed, although it

returns in memory prompted by his words and snatches of familiar tunes. Part of the dialectic of transcendentalist secularity is a hunger for large unities, the big picture, the great generalization forged in the face of a newly industrializing society, with an equal recognition that such grand insights (into nature, the self, the divine) are fleeting, and constant change is the new reality. The Alcotts essay projects just such a fleeting moment of harmony, a moment of consensus soon dissolved in time but recovered in memory. Echoing his own fondness for the small-town democracy he imagined in the Danbury and Concord of the past, Ives found a fragment of transcendentalism immensely useful for his own creative project.

Ives's essay on Hawthorne is equally about fragments, but few of the pieces connect to a transcendentalist heritage already diminished by the turn of the twentieth century. This essay is most unlike the others, most opaque, and perhaps the most autobiographical. Ives's other subjects all, in one way or another, strive to connect daily life with larger, invisible though real, truths grasped intuitively. In contrast, Ives's Hawthorne is a solitary fantast, an explorer of psychic space which is recoverable only in shards of memory. Writing (as with the other essays) after the music's composition, Ives tells us that "our music . . . is but an 'extended fragment' trying to suggest some of [Hawthorne's] wilder, fantastical adventures into the half-childlike, half-fairylike phantasmal realms."[28] He sees this quality in Hawthorne's stories collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse* and *Tanglewood Tales* and in episodes in *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. Here we see Ives at perhaps the greatest distance from the historical Concord and transcendentalism and closest to writing a kind of spiritual autobiography.

As is well known, Hawthorne was himself no transcendentalist. His portrait of "the Giant Transcendentalist" in "The Celestial Railroad" pokes gentle humor at this outsized figure who "shouted after us, but in so strange a phraseology that we knew not what he meant, nor whether to be encouraged or affrighted."[29] Hawthorne distrusted Emerson's philosophical idealism, while the latter seemed natively resistant to fiction of all sorts. Hawthorne's early stories, including the ones Ives mentions, did nothing for Emerson, who was supposed to have said that together Hawthorne and Bronson Alcott made a man. Still, Hawthorne was intimately connected with the transcendentalist circle and its outlooks. His first great literary admirer was educator and reformer Elizabeth Peabody, whose sister Sophia he courted and married in 1842 after his brief stay at Brook Farm. Hawthorne brought Sophia to live in the Old Manse, the Ripley/Emerson family house near the Old North Bridge in Concord. They lived there until 1845, trying to guard their domestic identity but also drawn into contact with the literary and reformist figures in their neighborhood.

Of all this rivalry and interaction, and of Margaret Fuller's charged interactions with Hawthorne, Emerson, and the poet Ellery Channing, we hear nothing in Ives's essay. We do find insights of another sort, though. Like Melville in his review of *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Ives grasped Hawthorne's obsession with "the influence of sin upon the conscience." Hawthorne was interested not in individual wrongdoing, Ives observes, but in the pervasive influence of guilt: "the relentlessness of guilt, the inheritance of guilt, the shadow of guilt darkening innocent posterity." And how does Ives express that version of Hawthorne in his music? Here is another puzzle: the prose portrait and the music do not cohere. With these "deeper ranges and profound mysteries of the interrelated worlds of human and spiritual life" his music is not concerned, but rather includes fragments of hymn tunes, camp-meeting melodies, slave shuffles, and circus music. And yet, almost in contradiction of his studied avoidance of Hawthorne's themes, Ives seems unable to stay away from the psychically troubled aspects of Hawthorne's fiction. That writing, he says, is often not representative of social reality (reflected in the hymn tunes and other music that derive from shared experience), but exploratory of process, "not something that happens, but the way something happens. . . . something about the ghost of a man who never lived, or about something that never will happen, or something else that is not." These mysteries and puzzles are evoked, not by philosophical reflection, but by echoes and memories.[30] Hawthorne suggests to Ives that "otherworldly" religious dimension that liberal writers and thinkers sought to dispel, the Calvinist sense of sin and salvation, the totally "other" God whose eternal decrees were mysterious and immutable, the sense of human incapacity to live up to divine expectations and the anguish that accompanies that incapacity. "Hawthorne" hints at the same tension that marked both the real-life author and his transcendentalist neighbors: the desire to live in a material world of democratic noise on the one hand, and the lingering sense on the other that there are larger and largely hidden patterns and forces at work compelling our lives, some of them friendly, some not so.

Perhaps Ives had so little to say about Hawthorne, and what he does say is so fleeting and merely suggestive, because Hawthorne had become such a household name by the turn of the twentieth century and so needed no introduction. While Hawthorne was still alive, his publisher James T. Fields worked assiduously to keep his works in print, to advertise and publish new works, and to collect yet-unpublished stories and sketches. Fields's influence on the emerging field of American literature in the mid-nineteenth century was monumental in his efforts to create a new literary canon—Longfellow, Emerson, Hawthorne, Holmes, Lowell, Whittier—and then ceaselessly advertise that canon. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Fields's mantle was assumed by Horace

Scudder, editor at Houghton, Mifflin. In his efforts to create the Riverside Literature Series, writes Richard Brodhead, Scudder saw American literature as the principal means to create and sustain American national identity. "In addition to expanding the scale on which they were disseminated, Scudder and the educational movements he worked with also helped give the American canon a wholly new degree of cultural legitimation."[31] Whether the Riverside series was on the Ives family shelves is unclear, but the volumes were everywhere in New England and throughout the nation by the first decades of the twentieth century, defining and shaping what Americans understood to be "their" literature.

Read in this context, Ives's emphasis on mystery, evanescence, and the supernatural feels subversive in the face of Scudder's cultural nationalism. Ives's Hawthorne is downright quirky and eccentric, not the national literary hero Fields and Scudder had championed. Here again we see ways in which *Essays* is best understood as spiritual autobiography, not as biography or cultural criticism. Ives's Hawthorne is an essentially isolated figure, as Ives himself was becoming, at least in the musical world, an explorer of disturbed psyches and the troubled past whose power lay in his ability to evoke sweeping themes through fragmentary, "half-childlike, half-fairylike phantasmal realms." In this sense, Ives captured crucial features of Hawthorne's art and life while at the same time reflecting, perhaps, something of his own personality. Hawthorne was moody, often withdrawn and silent. His novels and most often-read stories seem to contemporary readers troubled, inconclusive, and disturbing of cultural assumptions, making him seem hardly the figure to be celebrated as a national literary icon. In this context, Ives's sentence near the end of the essay is a shock: "Hawthorne's art was true and typically American, as is the art of all men (living in America) who believe in freedom of thought, and who live wholesome lives to prove it—whatever their means of expression," a sentence nowhere justified in the brief portrait he gives of Hawthorne.[32] Ives, it seems, desperately wants here to make his Hawthorne a member of the Concord community, a regular fellow, a typical American as Ives imagined himself to be, but everywhere else his Hawthorne is an outsider, as Ives himself was.

Ives's Alcott and Hawthorne essays are the merest sketches. They amply illustrate the point that, for Ives, as for much of the reading public in 1920, it had become all too easy to see these figures from the bygone century as occupying a kind of hazy memory-land of classic American fiction. Connections to the richly complicated, interactive, and gendered transcendentalist world in which, or near which, they worked had largely vanished. Yet Ives manages to recover some aspects of the potentially richer context, noting, for example, Alcott's immersion in the collective life of Concord and Hawthorne's eccentric relationships with his transcendentalist neighbors.

Ives's essays on Thoreau and Emerson are substantially longer. These are figures who clearly seized his imagination and in whom he saw a kind of confirmation of the spirit and intent of the musical work he had been doing since the turn of the century. In their length, too, these essays confirm his contemporary culture's view of transcendentalism—that, in one way or another, it had become the lengthened shadow of these two writers above all others.

By 1920, readers interested in Thoreau would have had available to them several resources, some more reliable than others. The oldest biographical resource was Emerson's eulogy, "Thoreau," published in the *Atlantic* in August 1862, followed in 1873 by the first biography, Ellery Channing's *Thoreau, the Poet-Naturalist: With Memorial Verses*. Frank Sanborn offered two distinct biographies of Thoreau in 1882 and 1917, as well as an "enlarged edition" in 1902 of Channing's earlier biography, with Sanborn's own additions. Also available were English socialist Henry Stephens Salt's elegant and sympathetic biography (1890) and Mark Van Doren's brief but keen defense (1916) of Thoreau against the barbs of Robert Louis Stevenson, as well as several volumes of reminiscences. Readers could sample selections from Thoreau's journals arranged seasonally by his disciple Harrison Gray Otis Blake, and the true Thoreauvian might have invested in (or admired in a local bookstore or library) *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau* in twenty volumes published by Houghton, Mifflin in 1906.

Ives seemed to be responding, as were Salt and Van Doren, to a persistent theme in then-available Thoreau studies and public perception, that of his cranky and antisocial behavior and the apparent extremism of his statements, claims, and advice. Ives acknowledges this quality in Thoreau's writing and the consequence for his reputation. "One hears him called, by some who ought to know what they say and some who ought not, a crabbed, cold-hearted, sour-faced Yankee—a kind of a visionary sore-head—a cross-grained, egotistic recluse—even non-hearted," Ives writes in language that might be mistaken for certain critiques of his own personality. But this is not Ives's Thoreau. "The personal trait that one who has affection for Thoreau may find worst is a combative streak, in which he too often takes refuge. . . . The causes of these unpleasant colors (rather than characteristics) are too easily attributed to a lack of human sympathy . . . instead of to a supersensitiveness."[33]

Rehabilitating Thoreau from this "hermit of Walden Pond" reputation led Ives to make three points. The first, as this passage suggests, was to claim that Thoreau's problem was that "he cared *too* much for the masses," that he was too easily wounded by injustice or indifference and so built a protective shell around himself. The second, building on that unprovable claim about what really went on in Thoreau's psyche, distinguished between the Thoreau of the scholars and biographers and "my Thoreau—that reassuring and true friend, who stood by

me one 'low' day, when the sun had gone down, long, long before sunset," a reference to the consolation Thoreau's writing apparently offered when Ives's father died unexpectedly in November 1894, just as Charlie was beginning his first year at Yale College.[34]

The third and most important move that Ives makes in his rehabilitation of Thoreau is to link Thoreau's immersion in the landscape to what Ives calls "the fundamental of Transcendentalism," namely the "'innate goodness' of Nature" as an analogy for the innate goodness of humanity. In this reading of Thoreau, nonhuman nature is a moral influence and encouragement by which "Mother Nature, if man will but let her, will keep him straight—straight spiritually, and so morally and even mentally."[35] This talk of nature's moral beneficence may seem unpalatable to modern readers who encounter *Walden* chiefly as an effort to challenge conventional pieties. Part of Thoreau's riposte in *Walden* and elsewhere was certainly to Calvinist notions of original sin and total depravity, but he likewise affronted his Unitarian contemporaries who embraced the belief that the universe operated according to rationally understandable and benevolent principles. In the chapter "Higher Laws," Thoreau describes his impulse to "seize and devour" a woodchuck "raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wildness which he represented. . . . I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good." At the same time, Thoreau discovers in a carnivorous diet a source of slothful life, and proposes to eat a simpler diet as a way to encourage his "higher or poetic faculties." Every action, every item of food, every thought affects the quality of one's life: "Our whole life is startlingly moral. There is never an instant's truce between virtue and vice. Goodness is the only investment that never fails."[36]

Still, "nature" offers both animal food and vegetable food, appealing to what Thoreau calls the lower and the higher faculties. The choice of one over the other does not spring from nature, but from the self, although the encouragement of one's "higher faculties" subsequently pays off in allowing a greater insight into nature's patterns and rhythms: "The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched."[37] Nor would Thoreau argue, as Ives seems to think he does, that humanity is naturally good or always chooses the virtuous path, only that we have within us the ability to discern and act virtuously, however much that ability is obscured by society's materialism and false values.

While Ives's Thoreau is in search of "fundamentals" that lie beneath, or alongside of, nature's diversity, he was (like Ives himself) a restlessly fluid

thinker and artist, often resorting to hyperbole: "a command of his today is but a mood of yesterday and a contradiction to-morrow. He is too volatile to paint, much less to catalogue. If Thoreau did not oversay, he said nothing."[38] The point, however, is not what Thoreau thought so much as what Ives found that was of use to him, and how Ives brought that version of Thoreau and his transcendentalism forward into the new century. For Ives, Thoreau was the unfairly discredited transcendentalist, the supreme example of an individual who was (like the movement itself) marginalized through rumor, humor, satire, and dismissive anecdote. Despite efforts to humanize Thoreau, such as Edward Emerson's *Henry Thoreau, as Remembered by a Young Friend*, published in 1917, Thoreau was still being portrayed, the younger Emerson lamented, as "pompous, rustic, conceited," imitative, lazy, unpatriotic, and a poor naturalist.[39] Creatively misreading *Walden* to see Thoreau as embracing a belief in innate human goodness, Ives links that belief to what he acknowledges as Thoreau's crankiness and concludes that his eccentricity is really a mask for a sensitive nature. That sensitivity is precisely what Ives recalls appreciating in Thoreau at the time of George's death in 1894, and records in 1920 as a clue to Thoreau's own tender heart. For Ives, "my Thoreau" is a projection of himself, as Ives imagines his own gruff exterior as a mask for his own tender heart, while his musical career, like Thoreau's literary one, went unrecognized or misunderstood.

By 1920, Alcott had largely vanished from view, Hawthorne had been installed in the canon of great American writers but quarantined from the other reformers and writers of his time, and Thoreau was still on the receiving end of heavy-handed humor or barbed dismissal. Only Emerson seemed secure in his reputation as "the Concord Sage," the great American philosopher. Still, as we saw earlier, Emerson suffered the fate of other famous writers in being often acknowledged but little read. Emerson was a special case in being not only installed in the canon, but also revered more for his personal qualities than for his writing. That reverence was ubiquitous in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as Randall Fuller observes: "Oliver Wendell Holmes, seeking to describe the almost suffocating authority of his friend, imagined an 'Emersonian atmosphere' engulfing American culture, permeating social discourse and limning art and its adjacent fields of philosophy, psychology, religion, and sociology. . . . Emerson is . . . properly understood as a figure of unparalleled *cultural* influence," a figure set against the enormous social and economic changes that threatened middle-class Americans.[40]

For Ives, Emerson was readily at hand, already a familiar figure from the cultural milieu, his family background, his college studies with Phelps, his wife's encouragement, and his rereadings of Emerson's essays in early 1919. Even more, Emerson has rich personal meaning for Ives, who sees in him a forebear striv-

ing to put into expressive form his intuitive insights into large philosophical and spiritual matters. Emerson is Ives's hero because his essays seemed best to explain Ives to himself, to offer a framework and apologia for the work he had already achieved.

Yet what is most remarkable about Ives's "Emerson" essay is how closely it adheres to the culturally conventional way of thinking about Emerson. When the reader wades through the many paragraphs about "substance," "manner," "romantic," and "classic," and through Ives's obsession with the "hog-mind," what emerges is an emphasis on character sounding much like Holmes's portrayal of Emerson's distinctive feature. Emerson is admirable because his character "is directly at the root of his substance [Ives's term for content or theme], and affects his manner [form, style] only indirectly." Ives goes on to suggest that "we like to believe that it is the height of Emerson's character, evidenced especially in his courage and humility, that shades its quality, rather than that its virtue is less—that it is his height that will make him more and more valuable and more and more within the reach of all." This is a ponderous way of saying that Emerson's character is great precisely because his thought is hard to grasp. Elsewhere in "Emerson," Ives quotes approvingly "a working woman after coming from one of his lectures [who] said: 'I love to go to hear Emerson, not because I understand him, but because he looks as though he thought everybody was as good as he was.'"[41]

Nonetheless, some aspects of Ives's Emerson escape the conventional version. Ives, for example, does ground Emerson in what he calls "Concord Transcendental philosophy," although it is not clear whether Ives thinks Emerson is the author of that philosophy or participates with others in its shaping. In any event, this philosophy is all about "innate goodness": "the strength and beauty of innate goodness in man, in Nature and in God."[42] Ives misreads Emerson here, as Peter Burkholder has observed, much as he misreads Thoreau. The potential in each person to gain access to the divine through the exercise of intuition is not the same as innate goodness, nor is this belief in immediate access unique to Emerson and the other transcendentalists. But assigning this belief to a powerful cultural figure makes it somewhat less threatening, more acceptable, much as Charles and Harmony sought to blend their Congregationalist backgrounds and love of the old revival hymns (with their message of sin and salvation) with their more personal, more expressive, and less theologically rigorous religious views.[43]

Finally, the most provocative and powerful insight of "Emerson" may be the most unintended. Ives's essay reveals a deep and creative tension in the transcendentalist movement, in his own work, and in other examples of American secularity: a hunger for a core of transhistorical, transpersonal universal "truths" that

coexists uneasily with a process that embraces fragments, fluidity, experiment, and change. "Here comes the difficulty," Ives writes, "the futility of attempting to fasten on Emerson any particular doctrine, philosophic [*sic*], or religious theory. Emerson wrings the neck of any law that would become exclusive and arrogant." And elsewhere: "The dislike of inactivity, repose, and barter drives one to the indefinite subjective. Emerson's lack of interest in permanence may cause him to present a subjectivity harsher on the outside than is essential."[44]

Ives was convinced that an aural or verbal art made of fragments aspires to, or is inspired by, a conviction of universals underneath. True, he devotes considerable space in the "Epilogue" to *Essays* to discussion of "the law of perpetual change, that ever-flowing stream." One composer is replaced by another, one critic by another. But what persists in the midst of such change, such "art-process," as he calls it, is the universal truth of "art-dualism," a conviction that enduring art emerges from, or is founded on, "those kinds of unselfish human interests which we call knowledge and morality," to be distinguished from a "lower value of form, quantity or manner." Where does this insight come from? Ives asks, and responds, "We do not *know* that all this is so, but we *feel (or, rather, know by intuition)* that it is so, in the same way we know intuitively that right is higher than wrong."[45]

Much modern art seemed to Ives to be all about manner, especially in an age dominated by technically proficient professional musicians and ensembles who appealed increasingly to prosperous urban audiences. In contrast, Ives thinks that enduring art is made by those who open themselves to as much influence as possible. He imagines any "maker" standing "unprotected from all the showers of the absolute which may beat upon him . . . all lessons of the infinite that humanity has received and thrown to man, that nature has exposed and sacrificed, that life and death have translated—if he accepts all and sympathizes with all . . . *then* . . . [he] is growing and approaching nearer and nearer to perfect truths." Indeed, part of the problem with any art form is that it is a form, and thus necessarily contains and limits the maker's intentions. As Ives writes in an often-quoted passage, "My God! What has sound got to do with music! . . . Why can't music go out in the same way it comes in to a man, without having to crawl over a fence of sounds, thoraxes, catguts, wire, wood, and brass? . . . Is it the composer's fault that man has only ten fingers?"[46]

At the same time, Ives believed that enduring art is best appreciated by people confident in their common sense, an echo of his celebration of this trait in "The Alcotts." "The majority-spirit, the common-heart, the human-oversoul [are] the source of all great values." So, universal truths emerge in art where the emphasis is on substance rather than technique, a distinction discerned not by rationality but by intuition, and discerned best when the discerners are not profession-

als but ordinary people confident in the wisdom of their common-sense views. Where might we find such people, and in what circumstances? "There are communities—now partly vanished, but cherished and sacred—scattered throughout this world of ours, in which freedom of thought and soul, and even of body, have been fought for. . . . America is not too young to have its divinities, and its place-legends. Many of those 'Transcendent Thoughts' and 'Visions' which had their birth beneath our Concord elms—messages that have brought salvation to many listening souls throughout the world—are still growing day by day to greater and greater beauty—are still showing clearer and clearer man's way to God!"[47]

Writing the essays, Ives brought to bear the resources available to him. He had Emerson's essays, Thoreau's *Walden*, Mark Van Doren's recent critical study, James Russell Lowell's satirical portraits of Thoreau and other New England writers, some of Hawthorne's novels and stories, Henry James's biography of Hawthorne, nothing of Bronson Alcott. He had some music criticism and history. He had his family's stories, his collegiate studies, his wife's appreciation, and his larger culture's assumptions. To all this Ives added his own interests, needs, and preoccupations as a composer, thinker, and writer.

Ives echoed much of his culture's views in all these essays. His portrait of Emerson is in many respects the conventional one that stresses the author's character rather than an engagement with his texts. His lack of interest in Alcott's contributions as an educational reformer and philosopher matches the general disinterest or skepticism about transcendentalism's contributions to social reform. He acknowledged the widespread view of Thoreau as the village crank and sought to rehabilitate him as one who possessed a sensitive heart and responsive intellect beneath an antisocial exterior. Ives's view of Hawthorne is most at odds with the cultural practice that had installed him in the pantheon of American literary greats, although Ives did make one halfhearted attempt to celebrate his art as "true and typically American." In reality, Ives's Hawthorne is, like his Thoreau, an *isolato*, more at home in the supernatural and invisible world than in the daylight of ordinary reality.

Ives strenuously wanted to see these figures as foreshadowing his own interests in finding universal truths beneath or beyond the welter of ordinary truth. What emerges at the same time from his portraits of three of them—Emerson, Hawthorne, and Thoreau—is their fascination with and representation of motion, fluidity, and fragmentation: one thought leading to another, a wisp of a memory, a song fragment, a half-heard conversation, an inconclusive exchange. They, too, with Alcott, hungered for large truths and universal insights, and Ives insists that this is what is memorable about them. But Ives's inability to pin down those large truths reflects the fact that, in Ives's time as in the mid-nineteenth

century, such large claims seemed increasingly elusive or were recalled only nostalgically. Ives's own compositions spring from the very same creative and difficult dialectic: the fragmentation of conventional harmonies and key signatures coexisting with pieces of old hymn and band tunes without necessary resolution, with this dialectic between fragmentation and the hunger for unity comprising modern American secularity.

Having explored the affinities between the nineteenth-century writers and his own musical signature in *Essays*, Ives's claims on transcendentalism gradually slipped out of his hands, only later to be taken up by others bent on identifying him with the nineteenth-century writers. As he turned away from the *Concord* Sonata and its accompanying *Essays*, his musical output slowed, although he continued to revise manuscripts and work on his final, unfinished *Universe* Symphony. His physical energies had also been perceptibly slowing, as well, with what may have been heart attacks in 1906 and 1918. Harmony had worked hard to create safe havens for her husband to work, but he was temperamentally irascible, and minor irritations increasingly flared into explosive outbursts. In retrospect, *Concord* and *Essays* were magnificent ways for Ives to channel his passions in these last years of original composition. In them, he found temporarily the final and possibly best outlet for the search for essential truths expressed in fragments that turned out to be the hallmark of his music. Now out of the composer's hands, the music and the prose became part of the cultural archive—and part of the conversation about the meaning of transcendentalism in the twentieth century.

By the 1930s, Ives's music was being performed more regularly, and had entered into a much larger dialogue about the role of the arts in American culture. That dialogue was in part prompted by the programs of the Works Progress Administration, which employed artists, writers, composers, and actors to bring arts to underserved audiences, and, as well, to explore past and current American culture as themes for their ongoing art. In this context, Ives's music, some composed more than a quarter-century earlier, seemed at least in its titles and musical quotations to serve such needs. Gradually, Ives's music gained a larger audience through the interventions of figures like Henry Bellamann, Henry and Sidney Cowell, conductor and composer Bernard Herrmann, and Russian émigré conductor Nicolas Slonimsky. The Cowells, especially, saw in Ives a homegrown modernist, a composer isolated from the currents of European modern music exemplified by Scriabin, Varèse, and Stravinsky, and yet pioneering a new form and sound in music earlier than those celebrated figures.

Ives's music was often cited in the lively critical conversation in the 1930s about whether there can be, or should be, a national music. In a review in *New Masses*, John Sebastian described Ives's music as an "indigenous[ly] American

music, virile and inventive," whose "vigorous devices of harmony and rhythm" were meant "to startle and frighten the unimaginative and the decadent. . . . Meanwhile, unrecognized, an American composer has steadily and modestly created a standard which refutes the charges of all who persist in denying the existence of an important American music."[48] On the opposite end of the political spectrum, *Time* opined in January 1939 that "today Ives is regarded even by conservative critics as one of the most individual and authentically American of all U.S. composers."[49]

Ives allowed this view of him and his music to flourish, discounting his own sophisticated knowledge of European music and cultivating a populist persona rooted in democratic ideals. In reality, Ives was deeply aware of new currents in contemporary music. Composer Elliott Carter recalled seeing Ives "around 1929," tinkering with *Three Places in New England*, "turning octaves into sevenths and ninths, and adding dissonant notes. . . . I got the impression that he might have frequently jacked up the level of dissonance of many works as his tastes changed."[50] Eventually Carter came to a deeper appreciation of Ives, whose frequent revisions reflected his understanding of his music as constitutively unfinished. In a more measured evaluation in 1944, Carter observed that "there is also [in Ives's music] the amount of detail left to the interpreter's discretion. The polyrhythms, which appear to be precisely written, obviously call for an improvisatory technic hard to achieve in ordinary rehearsals."[51]

This effort to nationalize and Americanize Ives coincided with a new appreciation of the transcendentalist writers and their antebellum movement. Critics and scholars like Lewis Mumford in *The Golden Day*, Van Wyck Brooks (who had dramatically changed his mind about the value of the nineteenth-century writers, including the transcendentalists, as a resource for contemporary culture) in *The Flowering of New England*, and Vernon Louis Parrington, whose *Main Currents in American Thought* continued to gain traction in a decade that was rediscovering the progressive reform tradition, added their influential voices to a reappraisal. As Ives's music, including the *Concord* Sonata, was performed, critics began to connect the music to a newly respectable and thoroughly American tradition. Ives himself was newly celebrated as an authentic American hero, much like his forebears Emerson and Thoreau. In a February 1934 column for the *Boston Evening Transcript*, Nicolas Slonimsky called attention to Ives as a distinctively American modernist who borrowed freely from whatever sources he found useful. "Sometimes he invites the player to contribute his own talent in the matter of rhythmic arrangement of given notes." Least of all is Ives reliant on European tradition or fashion, "the dernier cri of Paris." Rather, "Ives wants music to be grasped, and poured out, rather than read from one barline to another."[52]

In 1938, composer Dane Rudhyar (born Daniel de Chennevière) made a case for Ives as a seriously transcendental composer in his essay, "The Birth of the Transcendental Movement and Its Manifestations In Music and the Modern Dance." While not making specific reference to the nineteenth-century American movement, Rudhyar praised the efforts of several twentieth-century composers and dancers whose work he calls "transcendental," particularly in the sense of going beyond accepted limitations. The first decades of the twentieth century, Rudhyar tells us, were marked by a search for "a new technique, for new formal relationships between melodic lines and tonalities in music," clearly revealed in the polytonality and atonality of the music of Stravinsky and Schoenberg. But, since 1920, Rudhyar argues, music had reverted to a "neo-classicism" that recalled baroque and pre-baroque forms. This turn backward he accuses as "a form of cultural Fascism." Standing against such revanchism are certain American composers, like Carl Ruggles and Charles Ives, the latter of whom Rudhyar calls "the most significant of American-born composers."[53]

Critic Paul Rosenfeld witnessed what he called the first "public" performance of the *Concord* piano sonata in November 1938, although it took place at a private home in Cos Cob, Connecticut, played by John Kirkpatrick. Of the music's modernity there could be no question, Rosenfeld made clear. Ives "anticipated European polytonalism and polyrhythmicality in works earlier than this sonata (the date of its publication at least was 1920) [and] surpasses [Leo] Ornstein and well nigh out-Cowells [Henry] Cowell in the bold use of tone-clusters in instances containing as many as sixteen close-lying notes"—which the performer could accomplish by use of a board laid across the keys. For Rosenfeld, the music seemed to convey some deep "enchantment," some mysterious connection to immaterial but real powers at work in the cosmos. Ives seemed to be channeling the "forces and values of the Concord transcendentalist band," a "mystical fellowship." Even more, this fellowship was "the source of the American and democratic idea," which had found its musical counterpart in Ives. Rosenfeld provides little more about that idea, only to suggest that it has something to do with the self's intimacy with nature and ability to intuitively experience the divine.[54]

Although critics and audiences had already been exposed to Ives's sonata and his self-described link to transcendentalism throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the transformative moment came some two months later on January 20, 1939, with John Kirkpatrick's performance of the entire sonata at New York's Town Hall. Kirkpatrick's familiarity with the work dated from the spring of 1927, when pianist Katherine Ruth Heyman showed him her copy at her Paris studio.[55] Kirkpatrick would study the music throughout the decade, corresponding with Ives, meeting him in 1937, and giving performances of the sections he had mastered.

The day after Kirkpatrick's recital of the full *Concord*, Lawrence Gilman's effusive review appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune*.

Celebrating Ives as "the most original and extraordinary of American composers," Gilman quoted extensively from Kirkpatrick's program notes to build his case. Kirkpatrick provides there a history of the sonata's composition, all the way from Ives's orchestral overtures of the first decade of the century, which were gradually recast into an "immense four-movement impressionist symphony for piano bound together by a thematic unity which bespoke the common Concord soul." Supporting this point, Kirkpatrick cites Van Wyck Brooks's conclusion in *The Flowering of New England* that "it was Boston and Cambridge that grew to seem provincial, while the local and even parochial Concord mind, which had always been universal, proved to be also national." It is this linking of Ives's music to Concord, and both of them to American nationalism, that is most striking about Gilman's review. "Charles Ives is as unchallengeably American as the Yale Fence," he begins, "on which he must often have sat while he was a student at the University." He goes on to make one of the strongest early cases for Ives as great American composer: "This sonata is exceptionally great music—it is, indeed, the greatest music composed by an American, and the most deeply and essentially American in impulse and implication. It is wide-ranging and capacious. It has passion, tenderness, humor, simplicity, homeliness. It has imaginative and spiritual vastness. It has wisdom and beauty and profoundity [*sic*], and a sense of the encompassing terror and splendor of human life and human destiny—a sense of those mysteries that are both human and divine."[56]

Gayle Magee has admirably shown the ways that Gilman incorporated the legend of Ives the ignored genius, whose authentic American modernism was only now being rediscovered. It was the same legend already cultivated by the Cowells, but one contradicted by the facts. Ives was known to many musicians and critics by the 1920s and had diligently cultivated his relationships with them. Throughout the 1930s, there had finally been increasingly serious interest in his music. Magee observes that subsequent commentators all pick up on the transcendentalist theme, which they may have found "comforting" in the face of deteriorating world conditions at the end of the 1930s. After the war years, she writes, "the [*Concord*] sonata became the most studied work in Ives's output, and the composer and his entire output were recast endlessly in transcendentalist terms." Ives's music became part of the cultural archive that underwrote a new sense of American uniqueness and prominence in the postwar world.[57]

Not every critic liked this work or subsequent symphonies, however, either musically or for their assumed appeals to nationalist sentiment. Paul Henry Lang criticized "the almost inept handling of the orchestra" and its "curious primitivism" which may have sprung from the absence of a musical tradition

and community in the early twentieth century. "There was no American musical culture into which he could have integrated his new art, and his predicament called for a revolutionary upheaval, a tabula rasa in form, language, and technique, in which his music could have found fulfillment. But revolution, which for the great Russian novelists was as natural in letters as in politics, is alien to the modern American mind."[58]

Nor did everyone accept unconditionally the intimate connections among music, text, and (eventually) national identity that Ives made and subsequent reviewers echoed. Surprisingly, among the commentators who were reluctant to see the music as programmatic were his friends from Yale years, John Cornelius Briggs and Henry Bellamann, the latter having been one of Ives's earliest supporters. Briggs, in a letter written from Canton Christian College in China, where he had moved in 1919 to become head of the English department, thanked Ives for sending a set of the privately printed copies of *Concord* and the *Essays*, but expressed deep reservations about their alignment. His insights into Ives and these paired works are worth quoting at length:

> I feel in reading again these past few days that the whole thing is a book that stands on its own legs. I can't think [of] it as "Before a Sonata" or "Before"—anything else. And here is just the tough drink of the "Prologue," tough because involved in that perennially tough and to me rather unnecessary inquiry which plagues all our music analyses,—the translatableness of music. I have stumbled and bungled over it all my life. You neither stumble nor bungle, but you seem faced in the direction of an ultimate "translatableness,"—a direction in which I can see no light.—Here's what I think I believe, only I can't say it, and I don't stop to think about it much when music really comes to me.
>
> Art is a projection into a realm beyond the understandable. . . . We cheapen this by calling it emotion and sometimes enjoy it so much that we stop right there. . . .
>
> Music is preeminent, (because of its aloofness from spoken word, material form or temporal thought,) in piercing this realm and making of this prophecy a definite super realization, a living experience. Why insist on always turning it back to a review of the understood and past experience,—to the commonplaces of reason and intellect? Why demand that it should be always a review of yesterdays, or even of the impressions which yesterdays have brought? . . . Sentimentalism is a spiritual death, sometimes a pleasant and perfumed death but a real arrest of progress on the very stepping stone to things beyond.[59]

For Briggs, music is a distinctive form, with a history, tradition, vocabulary, and form of production. To force music to "mean" something other than itself is a form of "sentimentalism," "a spiritual death," as he puts it. Musicality needs no

other reference or justification. For Ives, however, sound is everywhere, in contemporary life and in memory. Some sound is intensely private, summoning up sets of allusions and references known only to the self; other sound, including musical sound, is collective and shared, and recalls other, earlier, shared experiences. Thus, a composer, for Ives, moves among worlds of sound, only some of which are produced by instruments which he often, famously, found incapable of producing the sounds he heard or recollected.

Briggs was questioning the effort that Ives had long ago begun and that critics finally celebrated in the late 1930s and into the 1940s, of associating his music with extra-musical people and locations. Similarly, Ives's early champion, poet and novelist Henry Bellamann, skeptically addressed the larger question of national music, wondering whether Ives's regional references could or should be extended into thinking of his music as having a political dimension. In an early review of the publication of the score of *Concord* and *Essays*, Bellamann writes that "music is always just music, neither *American* music, nor *French* music, nor *Spanish* music, but *music*. . . . Its *national* character is but a superficial difference in idiom—rhythm, harmony and melodic contour." But then, Bellamann seems to acknowledge the possibility of such music: "On the other hand any effort which goes deeper into some mode of thought or manner of living essentially and exclusively American must interest as a movement in the direction of artistic integrity." Ultimately, Bellamann suggests, Ives's sonata is unperformable but is itself "an essay of lofty thought and feeling expressed in musical notation," an intriguing suggestion, and one not followed by the many pianists who have admirably performed and recorded the work.[60]

What seems to be the case is that Ives was writing originally and provocatively about the mid-nineteenth-century American writers and about what he understood to be transcendentalism. He was, even more, writing a defense of his own compositional approach and style and an attack on what he claimed was an exhausted, Europeanized approach to music-making and music-listening. Repeatedly in *Essays*, Ives makes a characteristic move: just as we find covertly in his own work, in discussing the subjects of the essays he writes about fluidity, movement, and fragments on the one hand, and, on the other, a hunger for a time and place of supposed cultural harmony, what Sarah Elbert, in another context, has called "the hunger for home."[61] Ives imagines Concord of the 1840s to be just such a place, as indeed he imagines other spots in New England, including his hometown of Danbury. Ives idiosyncratically lines up these fragments—fragments in the lives and works of his subjects, fragments in his own experience—into what constituted for him a plausible whole: his Emersonian desire to find cosmic unity in a disjointed world, his Alcottian love of domesticity and sentimentality, his Hawthornian interest in regional history and legend,

his Thoreauvian obsession with purity and "innate goodness." So Ives aligned, for the moment, his thoughts about these writers and their community with descriptions of his own compositional techniques, his own psychic condition, his culture's and his region's moment, all poised on the cusp of change. This interplay between fragment and holism, a version of the interplay between this-worldly and otherworldly, is characteristic of American secularity as inaugurated by the transcendentalists.

But that is the text. What about the music? Some scholars have tried to identify parallels between the literary work of the essays and the sonic work of the sonata. So the ascending arpeggios and thunderous chords (the "opening wedge") of the "Emerson" section may be Ives's sonic equivalent of the upward-aspiring and exploratory qualities of Emerson's thought and prose. The wispy flute lines in "Thoreau" suggest Thoreau's own flute music and the wafting if digressive quality of his thought. The sentimental hymn tune in "The Alcotts" suggests that family's cozy (if mythic) domestic bliss. The difficulty with this approach is that the essays were written after the music, which makes it unlikely that one can read into the music those specific passages from the prose. Of course, Ives does not help us out in our interpretive dilemma. What, after all, does the title *Essays before a Sonata* mean? Does Ives intend that one should read the essays first, before listening to the music? Does the title suggest that the essays stand in front of the music, as a kind of preface, or that the essays plus the sonata constitute a single work?

This last possibility brings us close to the relationship between music and prose. Both spring from the same compositional aesthetic, an aesthetic that Ives reveals not just in *Essays* and the *Concord* Sonata, but throughout the works composed in his most fertile and productive period. It is an aesthetic remarkably similar to that practiced by the transcendentalist writers and thinkers in the mid-nineteenth century, and may account for the "shock of recognition" that Ives must have felt when he reencountered those predecessors in the first decade of the twentieth century.

What is Ives's compositional aesthetic, and how is it "transcendentalist"? First, his music acknowledges the European heritage. He learned from his father to compose Bach fugues; he studied with Horatio Parker at Yale. He refers to Tchaikovsky, Chopin, Wagner, and Debussy in *Essays*. More recently, Peter Burkholder has demonstrated in painstaking detail the range of Ives's quotations from European composers, including Beethoven, Brahms, Liszt, Franck, and Bruckner. He writes in European-originated forms—symphonies, sonatas, overtures, songs. Similarly, the nineteenth-century writers were grounded (though some more thoroughly than others) in English and European literature and philosophy. All the principal male figures except Alcott, Parker (who received a de-

gree from Harvard Divinity School but not Harvard College), and Orestes Brownson were college graduates, and Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody had what amounted to university educations from one parent or another. The transcendentalists knew European and classical languages; they subscribed to English and European journals; they constantly quoted historians, essayists, and belletrists in their work. Even more, American transcendentalists participated in the same movement toward secularity as did other thinkers and writers in the long nineteenth century. While they, like Ives, hungered for absolutes and craved the ideal, their work (in language, in reform, in personal behavior) was improvisatory, experimental, and designed to outrage, and in this regard they, like Ives, were part of Euro-American modernity.

Then, like the transcendentalists, Ives had no fawning respect for the tradition he inherited. It was there, along with a myriad of other musical resources, for him to mine: snatches of melody from the European composers, bits of transition, together with the hymn tunes, marches, and fiddle music from his childhood and youth. Nothing was privileged for Ives; everything was available. For some listeners, this makes Ives's music an incoherent jumble, just the way Van Wyck Brooks in 1915 saw Emerson's range of references: "Witness for example that strange far-away tone in which Emerson so often and so characteristically refers to 'Plato and Paul and Plutarch, Augustine, Spinoza, Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher,' or 'the remains of Phidias, the Apollo, the Jove, the paintings and statues of Michael Angelo, the works of Canova.'"[62] What Brooks disparaged was in fact Emerson's characteristic compositional style—picking and choosing, assembling from the cultural archive, moving on. We see the same compositional style in Thoreau's *Week on the Concord and Merrimack* and in Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, to choose other well-known examples. In these literary examples as in Ives's music, readers/auditors benefit from knowing the originals in order to appreciate the creative and often insouciant liberties taken with them.

Pursuing this claim about Ives's assemblage aesthetic, his willingness to rummage through the music archive without privileging one source above another, we might ask: what is the effect on audiences of hearing snatches of familiar melodies? In an essay on Ives and Mahler, Leon Botstein suggests that both composers blended aesthetic innovation and cultural nostalgia by relying on the acoustic environment: "In their music they both self-consciously reflected on the everyday sound experiences encountered by listeners and composers in modern life and compared those experiences with their own personal memories." Like other forms of narrative in an increasingly literate society, Botstein notes, music has the power to awaken memories in the hearer, which can then be juxtaposed with "new sounds" to create "a deeper and perhaps more self-reflective and self-critical act of listening." This intersection of memory with

modern urban life constitutes one of the "salient predicaments of modernity." Here is how snatches of familiar melodies work in Ives (and in Mahler as well): they reflect Ives's nostalgic hunger for a simpler, more culturally cohesive time and place, and simultaneously his "faith in progress and humankind and his commitment to the power of music led him to transform his nostalgia into experimentation and an avant-garde aesthetic."[63]

Modernity as a social experience depends increasingly on technology for ease of life, and Ives was deeply distrustful of such so-called advances. Even more, the culture of modernity in the hands of many of its practitioners seemed to Ives to disdain ordinary life, middle-class virtues, and religious beliefs. Opposed to what Botstein calls "the self-appointed role of rebellion that involved the assumption of a bohemian style designed to discredit common-sense morality," Ives was a cultural conservative for whom overt expressions of sexuality and stylistic exaggeration were repulsive.[64] So his eclectic mix of musical quotations from a great variety of sources woven together with music of his own making was meant to awaken in his listeners significant and value-laden memories and thus bring back a past that was potentially at odds with an accelerating modern life.

Ives wanted no easy or comfortable music, but rather a *moral* music that simultaneously participated in and critiqued the modern age. The difficulty, of course, in a compositional aesthetic that relied (in part) on audience recognition of the embedded fragments as part of their overall understanding and appreciation of the work is that such recognition may diminish over time. Quotations rely on a common fund of reference, a shared recognition of the original as it appears in the new work. Quotation functions only for a while unless somehow refreshed. Bach's eighteenth-century audiences may have been amused or horrified by his quotations from German drinking songs in his sacred cantatas, but most listeners no longer recognize or care about those melodies' origins, only their place in the larger compositions. For a time in the twentieth century, audiences may have experienced a richer sensory experience by recognizing the tunes embedded and altered in Ives's music, but eventually (and even now) that recognition will fade.[65]

This distinctive mix of innovative new aesthetic elements and fragments (verbal, aural, ideological) that evoke an earlier time of supposed cultural cohesion or rich personal experience is not an invention of Ives's or of other twentieth-century American cultural workers, but is rather an inheritance and echo of transcendentalism. Ironically, with all that Ives got wrong, factually and interpretively, about transcendentalism and Concord, he did grasp one central truth about the movement: transcendentalism was an effort to express "universal" truths without recourse to a particular religious or philosophical affiliation (although Ives himself was a Protestant Christian), and to express those truths

not systematically, as a unified whole, but rather as fragments, as momentary flashes of insight. Transcendentalism was, and is in the hands of its descendants, always fragmentary and symbolic; its faith is in the unseen whole toward which it gestures and in the fragmentary evidence that such wholeness exists. Of such was its secularity, and his.

FIVE } *Joseph Cornell: Things*

In April 1943, Joseph Cornell began an eight-month stint working at Allied Control Company in Long Island City, Queens, testing radios for fifty-five cents an hour. Just four months earlier, his artwork had been displayed in a three-person show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery, along with works by Marcel Duchamp and Laurence Vail, Guggenheim's ex-husband. The new works Cornell chose to exhibit—*Medici Slot Machine*, *Setting for a Fairy Tale*, and *Untitled (Pharmacy)*—are now considered outstanding examples of his assemblage art, but contemporary critics were mixed in their reviews. One called the entire show "surrealist, pretentious and silly in the extreme," but Clement Greenberg singled out Cornell as "greatly gifted."[1]

As Cornell reluctantly turned to the world of daily employment, his artwork turned toward another form. Continuing to construct and fill his signature shadow boxes, he also began to shape ensembles of notes, clippings, photographs, and prose narratives he called "dossiers." Two such dossiers, "GC 44" and *The Crystal Cage (Portrait of Berenice)*, together with his boxed doll, *Untitled (Bébé Marie)*, all completed or begun in the early and mid-1940s, make up the central evidence for this chapter's claim: that Cornell's work, while indebted to several traditions in modern Euro-American art, also belongs to the tradition of transcendentalism and its particular version of secularity. Other critics have noticed Cornell's affinities with transcendentalism. Dawn Ades writes that Cornell "was attracted to visual Surrealism, yet he was probably closer in sensibility to the American Transcendentalist tradition."[2] Carter Ratcliff explores parallels among Cornell, Henry Thoreau, and Emily Dickinson, seeing in all their work an interest in fragments that are shadows of "an unattainable wholeness."[3] Lindsay Blair makes the connection explicit: "Traces of the American Transcendentalist tradition can be discerned in Cornell's own trains of thought, and his dossiers certainly indicate, if not adherence to, at least a familiarity with Transcendentalist ideas. . . . He borrowed from the Transcendentalists a belief in a subjectivism in which the individual loses his sense of self to become, in effect, a transparent eyeball: this is a most unusual kind of subjectivism, one in which the individual personality and consciousness of the artist is subjugated to a spiritual force that flows through him."[4] None of these critics develops this insight, nor does any see secularity as a powerful common element in Cornell and the nineteenth-century American movement.

Aligning Cornell with the transcendentalists depends less on unpacking direct references or influences, as we can with the careers of Charles Ives, Truman Nelson, and Annie Dillard, but rather on identifying parallel emotional and aesthetic moves, discerning the similar ways they engage and interpret the world around them. There is, to be sure, a link between Cornell's embrace of Christian Science and Bronson Alcott's initial enthusiasm for the young movement in 1876. But Cornell's fascination with the material world never meshed well with Mary Baker Eddy's argument that the material was a malign illusion, but matched much better the view held by many transcendentalists of a "twofold creation," as Alcott put it. Like the transcendentalists', Cornell's "secularity" involved a thoroughly human-based worldliness, a deep immersion in the material and natural world, and a corresponding sense that the material world participates in a larger world of meaning which is forever just out of reach. Like the transcendentalists, Cornell cultivated moments of insight where the disparate pieces of experience cohere and, again like the American transcendentalists and their English and European romantic counterparts, he linked those moments of sudden inspiration and coherence with the condition of childhood. Although American transcendentalists were not acknowledged in Cornell's dossiers or letters (indeed, few American writers are, except Emily Dickinson), he nonetheless engaged and extended their tradition both as fellow practitioners of an aesthetics of inspiration and as scavengers of world cultures, and in their mutual quest for new moments of enchantment and new forms of expression. Finally, while Cornell was much less interested in the social dimensions of "human flourishing" that marked the work of many nineteenth-century transcendentalists, he was very much a twentieth-century version of the "fluid transcendentalism" that emerged in Thoreau's last writings.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Cornell's birthplace of Nyack, New York, had declined from the peak of its prosperity as a shipbuilding and manufacturing center, but still retained its standing as a comfortable, middle-class town within commuting distance of New York City, about thirty miles to the south. Typical of the prosperous families there were Joseph Cornell and Helen Ten Broeck Storms Cornell, both descendants of the seventeenth-century Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam's Hudson Valley. Helen in particular was proud of her lineage from her maternal grandfather William Voorhis, who was instrumental in bringing the Erie Railroad through Nyack. Her husband Joseph designed textiles for men's clothing, and his success bought the family a grand house with turret and curving driveway, set well back from the street. In this house the next Joseph Cornell was born in 1903.[5]

With his sisters Elizabeth and Helen, young Joseph experienced, at least according to the children's memories, an idyllic first decade, with gifts, family

music, sledding, picnics, and regular vacations, all the security and abundance that parental income and grandparental largesse could provide. Their father entranced the children with magic tricks and rewarded them with trips to amusement parks at Coney Island and elsewhere. Years later Elizabeth Cornell Benton would recall moments of that privileged childhood: watching a balloon float across the Hudson, sleeping at night on the porch under mosquito netting, watching from the top of the stairs as the parents sang and danced. Joseph loved Christmas in particular, celebrated with intricately decorated trees and gifts, all the more enticing since his birthday was on the twenty-fourth, making the whole holiday season all the more exciting, somehow as much about him as about the child in the manger.

Like his sisters, Joseph became an avid reader, devouring Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales and those collected by the Brothers Grimm, as well as the stories in Andrew Lang's *Red*, *Blue*, and *Green Fairy Book* collections. Other favorites included the hugely popular children's magazines *The Book of Knowledge* and *St. Nicholas: Scribner's Illustrated Magazine for Girls and Boys*. Joseph burrowed into these stories, so much that his mother had to insist that he play outdoors rather than stay inside reading. But the temptation for a quiet boy like Joseph to read and keep reading, especially in an era when there was such an abundance of print, was irresistible. Joseph, it seems, was drawn into a secret world, his own enclosed garden, yet one prepared for him by adult writers and publishers. In turn, the adult Cornell would shape private worlds of objects and language drawn from an immense and available array of historical and contemporary sources.

Neither Joseph nor any other American middle-class boy near the turn of the century would have been encouraged to create such imaginative interior worlds through the act of reading. Fiction for American boys celebrated action in the larger world through sports, games, hobbies, practical jokes, and hanging around with buddies. This was the message of George Peck's *Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa* (1883), Thomas Bailey Aldrich's autobiographical *Story of a Bad Boy* (1870), and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In contrast, young English readers would have had a very different set of titles available to them, including Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), James Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911), and the American writer Frances Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (also 1911), whose novel was immensely popular in England. These books, together with the elevated nonsense of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, constitute a critique of adult culture, offering instead a preference for the introspective, the imaginative, the fantastic, and the pagan over the imperial ambitions of Victorian adults.[6]

What can be known of young Joseph's imaginative life comes in part from Cornell himself, who recorded and catalogued his memories, and from his sisters, who provided biographers and critics more details of their life together. We know some things about the world Joseph and his siblings occupied, including early twentieth-century middle-class parents' willingness to provide their children reading material that encouraged belief in the supernatural and the fantastic, texts that seemed best absorbed through solitary and extended reading. We know, too, that the Cornells surrounded their children with an amazing array of objects—toys, trinkets, games, puzzles, ribbons, holiday decorations—that may have suggested the family's economic security as well as provided amusement. Cornell's solitary reading in fantasy and fairy tales and his fascination with objects may have merged to shape a private world, one in which the objects themselves glowed with a kind of enchanted intensity. For the adult Cornell, these objects had totemic power to recall chains of associations that substituted for his lost childhood, imbuing it with a sense of wholeness and wonder. That sense was at odds, it appears, with a larger family dynamic that was only briefly intact, and then quickly broken by an often-absent and then dead father and the arrival of a disabled younger brother upon whom their mother lavished enormous compensatory attention.

Joseph's family idyll was first disrupted in 1910 with the birth of the youngest child, Robert. Robert's difficulties with muscular coordination were apparent early in his life. The brain damage he may have suffered during his mother's difficult labor and delivery and its impact on his failure to thrive would only later be described as leading to cerebral palsy, but no such diagnosis was available in the early twentieth century. When his mother took Robert and the other children to summer camp in Sharon, Connecticut, the toddler was subjected to predictably unsuccessful physical therapy. At home, Joseph threw himself into amusing his younger brother, playing board games and taking him outside in his walker. Robert spent his entire life in a wheelchair, although he was not intellectually disabled and, as Deborah Solomon writes crisply, "was fully conscious of his fate."[7] Despite that fate, he was a cheerful and outgoing child and young man, quite the opposite of his withdrawn and tense older brother.

Two years after Robert's birth the Cornells were confronted with a second medical emergency, the diagnosis of the elder Joseph's leukemia. In 1916 he began to decline rapidly, and his wife put him into a nursing facility in New York City, where he died in April 1917. Joe, it turned out, was deeply in debt, and Helen was at first baffled by family finances. But she quickly rallied, put her family on a strict budget, invested in the stock market, and moved out of the large family home into a series of smaller rental houses in Queens. Despite her sudden financial tumble, Helen worked with Joe's former employer to find resources to send

son Joseph to Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. So, in September 1917, Joseph Cornell, having lost his father and about to lose his childhood home, set out to board and study in Massachusetts among wealthy young men bound for Ivy League universities.

Like many children, Joseph Cornell began early to collect objects that had deep emotional resonance for him. Rather than replace this habit with the twentieth-century adult practices of collecting jobs, clothes, houses, cars, and spouses, Cornell kept on collecting "stuff." During a summer work stint in 1919 or 1920 at the textile mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts, owned by his father's former employer, Joseph took time out to travel down to Cape Cod and visit the town of Sandwich, fascinated by the glassware made there since the seventeenth century and bringing back little mementos he still had a lifetime later.[8] But his attention to the minutiae of little objects did not help him focus on academic subject matter. During his four years at Phillips he amassed an unimpressive record in the "scientific" rather than "classical" curriculum, and left in 1921 without a degree. Cornell returned to Long Island and moved in with his mother and brother, completing the triad that would constitute his home life for the next forty years, until Robert died in 1964 and Helen the following year.

Back in New York, Cornell found work with the William Whitman Company, a wholesale textile firm, peddling samples to clothing manufacturers around Madison Square Garden and so duplicating his father's employment in cloth and clothing. Introverted and awkward, Cornell was an improbable salesman, and the stomach problems he had experienced as a child and then as a student at Phillips grew worse under the strain of his labors along "the nightmare alley of lower Broadway," as he later called it. His sister recalled finding him more than once on a park bench, bent over with anxiety and stomach pain.[9]

As with his solitary reading as a child, so now, as a young adult, Cornell sought refuge in imagined worlds. His great solace during these long years as a salesman came from haunting the secondhand shops in lower Manhattan along the streets in the Twenties between Second and Sixth Avenues, in Greenwich Village, and in Times Square. Here Cornell spent hours browsing bins of books, prints, old postcards, programs, trinkets and ephemera of all kinds. Of one such shop, The Sign of the Sparrow, Cornell later recalled that it was "for over 25 years a sanctuary and retreat of infinite pleasures, through many fluctuating phases of my life. . . . The strong sense of the past through these experiences, enhanced by the physical atmosphere of the shop—autographed photos and drawings on the walls, the statue of Rachel, bric-a-brac, the stove, the back room (allowed in there once or 2). To the end it remained a 'hole in the wall' purposely and many were the well-known authors, theatrical people, etc., who frequented it for its quiet charm."[10]

Cornell's love of these dusty shops was matched by his growing fascination with the movies of the twenties. He was drawn into the darkened interiors of ornate theaters in Queens and in Manhattan and drawn forward into the magical glow of the screen, set into its boxlike proscenium arch. Likewise he would reward himself for a week's work at Whitman's with standing-room tickets to the Metropolitan Opera or ballet performances. In the 1920s, as well, Cornell expanded his music collection, acquiring 78s particularly of French composers Debussy, Chabrier, Ravel, and Satie, and extended his awareness of the modern art displayed in the city's galleries and museums.[11]

So began Cornell's long fascination with the "thingness" of objects, especially on the small scale, and his obsession with handling and collecting them. He would bring these purchases home, cluttering the kitchen tables of the small houses he shared with his mother and brother, exasperating Helen but delighting the housebound Robert. Joseph also brought home supplies for Robert's hobbies—his shortwave radios, drawing sets, and music collections. After the family moved to Utopia Parkway in Queens in May 1929, Joseph built a model railroad layout for his brother, an entire miniature world with towns, crossing gates, elaborate track patterns, and extensive collections of locomotives and rolling stock. But Cornell's aesthetic was developing on its own, as he navigated through the urban mash-up of popular culture, material culture, high art, and relics of previous decades and centuries, all available in the bazaar that was New York in the twenties and thirties. From that time until well into the 1960s, Cornell would drift among shops and dime stores and book-and-record outlets, and browse through bins on sidewalks, buying old programs, postcards, thimbles, buttons, feathers, maps, books, records, anything that might prompt a creative "spark" linked to some other object or memory, to end up eventually in an assemblage in a box or on paper.

The story of Cornell's emergence into the art scene with his collages inspired by those of Max Ernst—a set of Ernst's being unpacked by gallery owner Julien Levy in 1931 as the young Cornell loitered nearby—appears in many sources, as does his association with the surrealist movement then in vogue. It is no surprise that Ernst's collages—which combine snippets of nineteenth-century illustrations into startling, dreamlike, often erotic works—should resonate with Cornell as the young man sleepwalked through a world of fragments: his own disrupted childhood, the continuing "childhood" of the house- and wheelchair-bound Robert, the world of secondhand shops, the compelling fantasy worlds of opera, ballet, and movies. Understandably, critics connected Cornell to one of the most daring art movements of the modern age. After an exhibit of *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at the Museum of Modern Art to which Cornell had contributed, an article in the November 1936 issue of *Harper's Bazaar* described him

as "one of the few Americans who fully and creatively understand the surrealist viewpoint." But he was disturbed by this interpretation of his work, and wrote to MOMA director Alfred Barr on November 13, "I do not share in the subconscious and dream theories of the surrealists. While fervently admiring much of their work I have never been an official surrealist, and I believe surrealism has healthier possibilities than have been developed."[12]

While it makes sense to connect Cornell with collage and surrealism, it takes more effort to reconcile the emerging artist of found objects with his embrace, by 1925, of Christian Science. Nothing seems further from the witty and worldly art of Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, or Salvador Dali, or from the pronouncements of surrealism's majordomo André Breton, than the unworldly, unmodern, Victorian faith crafted by Mary Baker Eddy out of the fragments of evangelical Christianity, social reform, and feminism. Yet Cornell did embrace that faith, much to his mother's scorn and his fellow artists' incomprehension. Plagued with headaches, insomnia, stomach distress, and anxiety likely prompted by tight living quarters at home and an unhappy job among the brash salesmen in the garment district, Cornell was ready for the suggestion dropped by a fellow salesman at Whitman's that he visit a Christian Science "practitioner." Cornell began attending Sunday services at the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Great Neck, Long Island, which he then formally joined in 1926. Over the next nearly fifty years, Cornell went to services, read Christian Science tracts and publications, and faithfully read through Eddy's *Science and Health: With Key to the Scriptures*. In 1952 Cornell joined with others to found a Christian Science church in Bayside where, a few days before his death in December 1972, he rose to thank the congregation and Mrs. Eddy for the faith in which he found comfort. Cornell rarely talked about his beliefs except with other followers like poet Mina Loy and ballerina Allegra Kent, but his diaries and dossiers are studded with Christian Science vocabulary and references to *Science and Health*. He wrote often of the "claims" of ill health, mental distress, or grumpy attitudes which needed to be "cleared," often through reading the daily lessons from *Science and Health*, which counteracted illusions of the "mortal mind." He notes, for example, in August 1945, the need to go out alone to "do some mental work to know the unreality of the claim of pressure at back of head. A beautiful feeling of gratitude for atmosphere of garden and woods in back of garage and of being rid of a feeling of always wanting to be somewhere else."[13]

By the time Joseph Cornell encountered Christian Science, it had been transformed from a tiny sect of quarreling students and practitioners into a large, profitable, systematic, and uniquely American religion, largely through the persistence and organizing ability of its founder. Through the more than four hundred editions of *Science and Health* (the vast majority were reprints of the last

substantial revision in 1907) and through tracts, pamphlets, and other publications, Eddy and her followers articulated the movement's key beliefs. Based on her early exposure to the approach of the healer Phineas Quimby and her own experience of mental healing, and rooted in a more general climate of belief in the power of mind to have practical effects in the world, Eddy proposed a radical idealism: the invisible spiritual world, created and sustained by an overarching God-Mind-Spirit-Love-Truth-Life, was the only real world. Each person was, in her view, an "individuated reflection of the divine Spirit, at one with it in essence," as Paul Conkin phrases it.[14] In this sense, humanity, rightly understood, is immortal. But few understand this truth, and thus the majority yield to false messages of the senses that convey a fantasy about the "reality" of pain, illness, and death. The material world, in Eddy's view, is a vast and consummate lie, the product of "mortal mind." The role of religion is to encourage people to move away from captivity to the senses toward a fuller awareness of their true identity as spiritual beings who share, as such, in the mind of God. For Cornell, to the extent that focused reading and meditation helped calm his dyspeptic digestion and soothe his jangled nerves, the practice had positive therapeutic outcomes. "A persistent tenseness relieved fully for the moment with the realization ~~of what the full~~ of the significance of C.S. in its supreme power to meet any human need," he wrote in his diary for December 8, 1949.[15]

Aesthetically, Christian Science reinforced Cornell's already growing preoccupation with interior worlds of associations and references. Indeed, some commentators see Christian Science as the single most important influence on Cornell, the dominant force that shaped his consciousness and his art. Sandra Leonard Starr, for example, thinks of Cornell not so much as an artist as "a metaphysical scientist and religious philosopher who used art as a means rather than an aesthetic end. . . . It is the metaphysical nature of Cornell's vision which distinguishes his work, predicates its existence, and determines its aesthetics."[16] The virtue of Starr's argument is that it forces Cornell scholars and admirers to take his religious commitments seriously. Undoubtedly, Cornell did often find the material world a burden, living as he did in a cramped house with a disabled brother and unappreciative mother. Christian Science provided him a way of working through these seemingly intractable problems by seeing them as temporal and manageable, less "real" than the inner world he inhabited. As Richard Vine puts it eloquently, "directionless, stranded in a secular, rationalistic society unsuited to his nature, he lived . . . in perpetual exile. . . . The Church of Christ, Scientist, provided Cornell . . . with a clarity essential to his sanity and his art—the certainty, despite everyday trials and confusions, of ultimate cosmic harmony within the all-encompassing Mind of God."[17]

At the same time, Christian Science does provide one way to tie Cornell back to the nineteenth-century transcendentalists. In January 1876, Mary Baker

Glover (not yet Eddy) sent a copy of *Science and Health* (1875) to Amos Bronson Alcott. Alcott wrote back saying that "the Sacred Truths which you announce and sustain by facts of the Immortal Life give to your work the seal of inspiration—reaffirm, in the modern phrase, the Christian revelations. In times like ours, so sunk in sensualism, I hail with joy, any voice that speaks an assured word for God and Immortality."[18] Alcott also asked if Glover would accept a visit at some later time. In his journals, Alcott reported this letter and observed that "Mrs. Glover appears to have attained her revelations through deep physical [*sic*, probably intending "psychical"] experiences, and writes as a seeress of divine things." After visiting with Glover and a few of her followers, Alcott wrote on January 20, 1876, that he found her "a devoted student of the New Testament, a Christian in the truest sense, an idealist in apprehending the supremacy of mind over matter, and a faith in Spirit transcending any contemporary whom I have been fortunate to meet." Two years later, Alcott recorded a much more qualified opinion of Mary Baker Glover Eddy, wondering whether some of the "nervous maladies" she wished to treat through mind-cure were rather the result of "improper modes of diet and regimen. . . . There is perhaps a touch of fanaticism, though of a genial quality, interposed into her faith, which a deeper insight into the mysteries of life may ultimately remove. I judge her present gifts are rather derived from her nervous temperament, combined with the faith with which she ventures into hitherto unexplored crypts of psychology, than from any established philosophy concerning such recondite matters."[19]

The difficulty in making Christian Science (or any influence) the single most important element in Cornell's worldview and his art is its reductionism, whereby every work is forced into an interpretive straightjacket. After all, Cornell immersed himself in a vast material world of objects and fragments of objects—collecting, organizing, handling, displaying, and curating them throughout his career—the very world that Christian Science abjured. These objects evoked for Cornell memories of the past and echoes of deeper meanings just beyond reach. His very material work has the wistful quality of desire for some unattained and unattainable "spiritual harmony." In this sense of living in a material world and waiting for the moment when its fragments would realign into meaningful wholes, Cornell's art and aesthetic draw upon a rich variety of traditions and inspirations, including Christian Science. Christian Science became for Cornell not so much a disciplined focus on otherworldly possibilities as a kind of attitudinal therapy for moments when his caregiving duties and concerns about finances became too much, and never blocked his lifelong fascination with the material world to which he gave himself without reservation.

So, while Bronson Alcott may have found Mary Baker Eddy's ideas appealing, at least at first, and his interest does offer one historical connection between a transcendentalist leader and Eddy's movement, it would be a mistake to lean

too heavily on that connection. Alcott was the most metaphysical of the transcendentalists, the least interested in the material world and the most ready to read the material as a passing shadow of the more "real," invisible world of ideal types and forms. So it should not be surprising that Alcott would be sympathetic to Eddy's approach to healing. But, as Robert Peel points out, the transcendentalist movement as a whole was never anti-material, whereas Eddy's approach "denies all reality to matter."[20] Indeed, in the midst of the decade in which his idealist philosophy was most on display, Alcott himself wrote in 1836 that "I am now finding an interest in the phenomena of the external world," including "the science of physiology." While "Physiology is none other than the study of Spirit incarnate," he observed, materiality was not therefore an illusion; God's handiwork is a "twofold creation."[21]

Without either denying or overemphasizing its importance, Christian Science thus joins several other streams of influence in which Cornell's work is immersed and by which it was continually refreshed: Christian incarnational theology; romantic and postromantic literature and culture, especially French; early and mid-twentieth-century popular culture; music, including opera, from the classical and romantic periods; romantic ballet; surrealism; and the American scene and its art forms. No single one of these "explains" Cornell. All intermingled with and enriched his distinctive quest for self through memory, resulting in his vast oeuvre of journals, dossiers, collections, collages, and assemblages. While this chapter seeks to demonstrate Cornell's affinities with the American transcendentalists and their distinctive version of secularity, that affinity is by no means *the* key to Cornell's art.

Still, Christian Science became the prompt for Cornell's most extensive and most interdisciplinary dossier, "GC 44," an assemblage of over a thousand pages of clippings, programs, notes, and copies of diary entries in hundreds of file folders, stored in two large gray cardboard boxes. The Garden Centre, a nursery and greenhouse near the Cornell house in Queens, was owned by a fellow member of the Bayside Church of Christ, Scientist, who offered Cornell a job there after Joseph left his post at Allied Control in January 1944. The daily bicycle ride (Cornell never learned to drive) took him through neighborhoods along Utopia Parkway and past still-rural parts of Long Island, with deserted farms and expanses of fields untouched by suburban development.

In his notes and diary entries Cornell describes a series of "sightings" of ordinary buildings, landscapes, and vehicles as visionary moments of heightened illumination. He mused on the meaning of these mystic moments and sought to reenact them by pedaling past the same sites in the following months. The first formative moment is recorded in Cornell's diary for May 13, 1944, under the heading "The Old Farm." He writes of stopping by a pond near an abandoned

farm and experiencing "a renewal of spirit associated with childhood evoked by surroundings—it seemed to go deep than this a strong sense of preexistence (rare but never to be forgotten) & then all of a sudden there it was. The long grey weather beaten farm house immaculate in the lush new long grass—its most prominent feature the yellow 'no trespassing' sign."[22] In a summer 1944 entry of another visionary experience, Cornell describes a "Floral Still-Life" as an "original inspiration." He had caught sight of a delivery truck with a sign depicting fish and smoked meats which, as the truck moved by, seemed to metamorphose into a still-life composition. In a "GC 44" entry from August 17, 1946, Cornell expands on this sighting: "The painted side of a small delivery truck specializing in smoked fish meats—something vivid and rich in the coloring of the silvery greys, reds and browns of the still-life arrangement (and echo of the more effusive renderings of the well known Dutch masters)—this warm sense of imagery glimpsed in motion in the vicinity of The House on the Hill on a late autumnal afternoon produced an extravagant effect—integrated itself into the 'picture' and evolved into countless metamorphoses."[23]

Cornell, it turned out, was prescient about the "countless metamorphoses" of these first formative glimpses. For the next twenty years and more, he would revisit "The Old Farm," "The House on the Hill" (an abandoned house near the seaside village of Malba, a favorite spot for collecting driftwood and dried grasses for his boxes), and the humble delivery truck, either by bicycling past these sites, reliving and rerecording his impressions, or by "extension" (as he called the process), remembering the original moments while in very different settings, watching his mind overlay the 1944 experience with new observations. All these subsequent glimpses, whether of original scenes or of new ones enhanced by memory of the original, were fodder for writing, rewriting, recopying, and filing in the expanding file folders of the "GC 44" dossier.

Two years after the original experience in 1944, Cornell's first "GC 44" moments were still fresh enough to be recalled with intensity, heightened by repeat visits to the same spot: "the original shining vision of the House intact on the Saturday morning ride to Garden Centre its virginal aspect of beauty. . . . the strong feeling of hospitality of a gracious hospitality as though the ones who had lived there and had loved it could not be parted. . . . the 'accumulation' of tradition and beauty of it before first evidences of disintegration. Its remarkably mature and unspoiled aspect,—really too beautiful and of too much a perfection to remain long so, uninhabited." After musing about the work he had been pursuing at the time of the first "sightings," Cornell concludes, "the 'renaissance' by the country stream with its evocation of childhood, the American scene, all its essense (see Audubon notes) an overwhelmingly transcendent serene state of mind,—then the vision (real) of the House in its immaculate setting of tree,

shrub, lush grass, barns, and smaller huts, well, bushes in flower, serenly remote in its own dream in the early morning air of a new spring. All this remoteness accentuated by the yellow 'no-trespassing' sign imparting a kind of sovereignty making it seem all the more forever inviolate."[24]

The original freshness of the "Floral Still-Life" truck was also still vivid for Cornell in 1946, as he describes in a letter to Mina Loy. He had come across the same truck he had first sighted in 1944, but now he saw it parked at the edge of a shopping center. It was unmistakable with its "enseigne in the form of a still-life of various stocks, fat chunks of meat surmounted by whole fish in colours that made one think it might once have been a bright decalcomania with its silvery whites, greys, reds and browns." The original image had become associated with other images or sets of historical references, so that this second sighting triggered not just the primal memory but the entire collection of associations:

> What I am leading up to is the lesson in INSPIRATION that shabby little enseigne held for me. For exactly two years before I glimpsed it IN MOTION for the first time on a beautifully clear and shining afternoon on a bike ride to an unfamiliar section near the water, in a landscape wonderfully evocative of the American past in its unfolding panorama (endless fields in the outlying suburbs). . . . Its trademark has since [penciled transposition mark around "has since" indicating reversal of order] given way to countless changes, from its gradual assumption of a typical Dutch table scene . . . or combined, into details such as one finds in the meadows of A Van Eyck of apocalyptic splendor. . . . All of this sometimes seems so evanescent and nebulous that it is difficult to mention it to anyone, let alone contain and communicate its significance and glow.[25]

As Cornell made the same journeys to and from the Garden Centre, along the shore of Long Island, past the Old Farm and the House on the Hill, past the little town of Malba, the same scenes would bring the same flood of imagery and sensation, together with memories of the original 1944 moments. In August 1945, for example, a bicycle ride along the familiar route brought back "that which is indelibly stamped in memory on the heart, in the mind's eye more than I ever can know—'pictures' that will slip thru in the years to come and overwhelm with poignant loveliness some experience seemingly routine & without signif in the press of life."[26] A ride toward the old farm in May 1947 brought "a surge of appreciation of previous numberless journeyings, experiences, feelings, the magic sheen transforming the whole succession of events, the wonders, surprises, the warm sense of love, profound and encompassing, accompanying all."[27] Cornell gradually became aware of this pileup of experiences-plus-memories, and at first reveled in it: "*This part of my journal* is the most profuse and overflowing—so

cluttered in memory & record with endlessly unfolding experience the mecca of a hundred rides (each with their rich 'cross-indexing' of varying mood). Altho' not the 'first love' it ↑this house↓ now stands a lone surviving sentinel (from its vantage point ↑where↓ it has seen the distant dust of demolition arise too often) a sanctuary for all my chaotic treasure,—a celestial repository."[28]

Cornell had hinted at the problem of "elusive significance" in an entry from 1946, just two years after the first formative Garden Centre experiences. "And so I attempt now (just 2 yrs later) to recapture the ↑nuance of the↓ adventure in some of the moments & minutes & hours of that spring summer & autumn, despairing of ever doing more than the faintest justice to their elusive charm."[29] But what in 1946 and 1947 were only hints at the difficulty of recapturing those moments became by 1948 a significant aesthetic and practical problem. Sometime in that year Cornell added a document to "GC 44" he titled "Approach #1" in the left margin and "first draft of Opening" at the top. The number of deletions, some of them thickly laid on, insertions, and marginal comments all point to Cornell's struggle to bring some shape to the burgeoning files. He begins with the disclaimer that ordinary life events are not meaningful in themselves—are, in fact, "thrice commonplace & trivial"—but that in his mind they are "transformed into such intensity & experience of living beauty."[30] This is a restatement of the now-familiar Cornell aesthetic of "metaphysique d'ephemera" (metaphysics of ephemera) his desire to infuse ordinary objects with a totemic glow.[31] But then the difficulties rear up: in the right margin, with many cross-outs and restarts, Cornell writes in pencil: "~~It is they are not~~ It is not recording of 'special moments' particularly—it is only that their intensity & frequency were such that I shall ever be uneasy until I recapture (in however inadeq degree) some approx of the original ~~glow~~ signif."[32]

Part of the problem was the sheer volume of material he was collecting in the dossier. "So that now before a bulging chaos of notes and souvenirs an engulfing futility at the thought of formulation, a hopelessness of adequate expression and recapture of countless ↑fugitive↓ ~~elusive fleeting~~ moments and longer periods these often undecipherable records desperately attempt to hold fast. . . . And while the simplicity and magic of the commonplace—the 'poetry of things'—is the key—by its very nature and essence is it made the harder to recall & communicate satisfactorily."[33] Rather than a record of recapture and re-experience of the primal moments, "GC 44" was turning into autobiography, an edited account of what once was. "Can the ecstacy of the original GC44 expers. ever be done justice to," he asked himself in 1952; "if not then the consideration of looking upon this compilation as a 'phenomenon,' an absorbing residue for which to be grateful even if the intensity of the original exps. cannot be recaptured & presented with the original full flavor & context."[34]

If this was an autobiography, though, it certainly was an unconventional one. In the last years of the 1940s and into the 1950s, "GC 44" was becoming an enormous Cornellian box, not surrounded by wood and filled with objects, but an assemblage of references, recollections, connections, and allusions. Cornell described the evolving project this way in 1947: "GC '44 is a diary journal repository, laboratory, *picture gallery*, museum, sanctuary, observatory, keepsake. It is the core of a labyrinth, a clearing house for dreams & visions. It is childhood regained (even for those who were born without it amidst the holocaust of war)."[35] With over a thousand pages of notes, documents, and clippings filling two grey cardboard boxes, the ultimate example of Cornell's collecting mania, "GC 44" is Cornell's largest dossier. Though deeply idiosyncratic, the dossier was also designed so that "the reader or spectator may through a completely individual approach find himself ↑lost↓ in the same world of beauty & wonder occasioned by the orig. experiences," or so its creator imagined.[36]

Yet there is little doubt that however much he cherished "GC 44" and added to it periodically through the remainder of his life, Cornell thought of the original impetus for the collection as now lost, "disintegrated in a couple of years."[37] What persisted was "the essential pervading glow always transcending the cataloguing, even making at times subsequent readings incomprehensible." "Note," he wrote to himself and to readers, "long lapses of time when GC 44 has lain dormant—in thought & material assembled."[38] Through the 1950s and 1960s Cornell occasionally added notes, fragments, quotations, and clippings that somehow echoed a bit of the original stimulus, but increasingly in ways available only to Cornell himself. Sometime in 1951 he wrote, "Never finished (GC44) but unfolding and continuing in unsuspected places & times; in a ↑old↓ print, a modern colour, a new or old master, something read in the daily paper or a book. A face seen in a crowd or on the 'long journey home' via subway ~~the city skyline fading~~ etc. the thread caught up with seeming never ending freshness and significance."[39] As late as 1970, Cornell would write, "GC44 exhumed from garage," a startling postmortem comment for a work that had so consumed him a few decades earlier.[40] Now that the work seemed less transparent to the original impulses and more a distinct work of art on its own terms, the question was how to display it and make it available to others. One possibility might be, he thought, to mount pages on plates which could be viewed in differing orders. "The reader ↑is thus left↓ to 'enter' . . . the 'House on the Hill' via the plates of his own choosing," as if "GC 44" were indeed a Cornellian box.[41]

But how does a reader/viewer enter a work which seems so inward, so hermetically sealed, so based fundamentally on a uniquely personal set of experiences which the artist had the good fortune to repeat, more or less exactly, in order to reinforce the emotional impact of those original experiences? After all, Cornell

himself struggled for years to express exactly the epiphanic experiences of those first bicycle rides, so many sensations that the very flood of them seemed to be a "rapid overflow of experience—bewilderingly, capriciously, elusively, but with ~~such~~ a gracious~~ly~~↑,↓ ethereal touch." He felt himself "standing upon the threshold of the world of authentic visions and being allowed to linger—~~this~~ being plunged into this apocalyptic realm of shining beauty." In the margin of this page of "Random Notes," as he called them, Cornell typed "the 'heart' of it all," with an arrow pointing to the words "apocalyptic realm of shining beauty."[42] One approach to recover that realm was for the artist to reenact the rides, to take his bicycle out toward Malba again and again in search of the same rush, the same "extraordinary degree of ~~immanent magic~~ ↑felicity, graciousness↓ of spiritual harmony."[43] But this strategy was bound to fail: the House on the Hill had been demolished.

Cornell's experiences in May 1944 seem to have opened him to the possibility of encountering the "metaphysique d'ephemera" anywhere, not just along the magic route toward the Garden Centre. He was training his perception, shaping momentary "boxes" around ordinary experiences and objects and filling them with compositional beauty and spiritual intensity. In his diary he gave this process a Christian Science inflection at one point, calling it "the transformation of persons, places & objects etc in the exaltation of experience—nec. of the realization of the *mental* nature of this—the significance of its spiritual nature—the importance of recapturing its meaning in its context & full flavor," and noting in the left margin "for GC file."[44] Examples of such extensions are everywhere in the dossier. On the way to Pennsylvania Station in January 1947, just before the commuter train entered the tunnel, he caught sight of some graffiti: "the word Jane scrawled on a box-car in large letters, red ↑mixed↓ with a touch of pink, then touches of primary colors mingling with a scene of men working on the tracks with a long crane mounted on a car—all over in a flash but evoking a strong feeling—had not remembered anything just like that at that point. . . . Once in a while a touch like the above. This enhanced by a touch of spring in the air. Sunny."[45]

Two years later Cornell experienced and recorded an illumination that he linked back to the 1944 delivery truck and his interpretation of its sign as a "floral still-life." He had seen a copy of *Life* magazine featuring Van Eyck's altarpiece *The Adoration of the Lamb* while waiting for his brother Robert at a dentist's office. Then, a week later in a store in the shopping center where he had spotted the delivery van for the second time, he came upon the magazine spread again. It might have been difficult to appreciate the connection, he admitted, had he seen the magazine at home, where he often experienced "overwhelming nervousness": "Upon contemplation the Van Eyck glows ~~in thought~~ as a beautifully realized,

metamorphosed, sublimation of ~~the~~ original commercial enseigne ↑of the experience;↓ with the feeling of the grasses, the fields, the flowers, the rarified and spiritual quality of the dream. . . . The circumstance of finding the magazine in almost the same place yet removed by worlds."[46]

One more example will suffice to indicate the technique of "extension." After a bus ride out to College Point in August 1951, Cornell reflects:

> Experiences like the original ones of "The House on the Hill" (Malba) in the late summer or early Fall, when their full flavor either through revelation or meditation can be recaptured, ~~might be likened to a seed being planted~~ were extraordinary renewals of the past ~~plus~~ in addition to the revelation ↑itself↓, ~~the~~ confrontation of ↑the house in↓ the present. What could ever express those feelings in their felicity, depth, supreme happiness and wonder. Rather than ever expect to do so by a passage of written words or of a picture that might be painted, these experiences find an endless fulfilling in literature, painters' images, items found unexpectedly in newspapers, any sundry stray item that might bring an "extension," ~~a complete~~ a renewal of the original magic.[47]

This "renewal of the original magic" comes close to describing the method of "GC 44." As part of his concern for the "bewildering confusion of material collected in the train of experiences the emergence from these oftentimes incoherent scribblings (incoherent upon subsequent reading at least)," Cornell wrote often of the need for an approach to his material. Perhaps his idea of reducing the "prolixity of notes and diary entries" to a set of plates might help to reduce the "slavish dependence upon the originals."[48]

In fact, Cornell was not interested in structuring "GC 44" so much as he was in seeing the immense dossier as itself providing a method for his entire approach to art. The problem, he seemed to be saying around 1951, was not that there was too much material, but that there was too little, not enough description and context provided to recall the original vision. "The 'context' of the recorded events of which the bare words are sometimes discarded so empty are they of the original feelings when care was not exercised to jot down more than the factual, or when it was taken for granted that they could be recap'ted so easily." The assumption is "that such transfiguration is permanent," but the memory does fade, the initial feeling that gave rise to the first recounting dissipates. "Thus as an exercise, a method may be worked ↑out↓ for the recording of other past experiences ~~less intense &~~ seemingly insignificant. G.C. 44 realized successfully can become a 'method' for crystallizing experiences of the above sort ~~in a communicable form~~ never before considered." Ironically, Cornell seems not to have realized that he already had found "a method for crystallizing experience" in the assemblage boxes for which he was already famous.[49]

Given the nearly inexhaustible riches of the existing "GC 44" and Cornell's enthusiasm for "rich cross-indexing," readers may be grateful that the dossier preoccupied him less and less in the 1960s and early 1970s and that he did not pursue his efforts to recover or extend the original visionary experiences by writing even more. Never published separately, too-little discussed by commentators other than art historians, "GC 44" is a monumental late-romantic "museum without walls," a vast treasure-house of scraps of Western culture. It is a map of its creator's mind as it followed its own synaptic pathways from one memory to another, from an original glimpse through chains of associations spiraling outward like some fantastic mid-century World Wide Web. "GC 44" records a series of exemplary moments of insight into what Cornell called "spiritual harmony," exemplary both as a representation of Cornell's mind and as an invitation to readers and viewers to see the world differently for themselves.

Since the close of the eighteenth century, Western readers and viewers, challenged by the philosophical and material transformations of their society, had likewise sought to see their world differently. Judging by references in his diaries and dossiers, Cornell seems not to have been attracted to Anglo-American romantic writers and texts the way he was to the French romantics like Nerval, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and especially to Mallarmé and the novelist Alain-Fournier (pen name of Henri-Alban Fournier). From Alain-Fournier, Cornell adopted the phrase "Grand Meaulnes moments" after the novel *Le Grand Meaulnes* (1913), in which the young Augustin Meaulnes stumbles across a hidden estate, loses track of it, and spends the rest of his life living in the shadow of its elusive yet proliferating meanings. Still, Cornell's "GC 44" seems a striking extension of the insights offered in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English prose and poetry. Cornell's "metaphysique d'ephemera," although drawing directly upon Gérard de Nerval, is, in Cornell's hands, a kind of restatement of Wordsworth's desire "to make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them . . . the primary laws of our nature," as he put it in the 1800 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.[50] In another parallel, the passages known as the "spots of time" included in Wordsworth's long autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, anticipate Cornell's illuminated moments at the House on the Hill or in sightings of the "Floral Still-Life" delivery truck. Cornell's sorrow at the fading of the original 1944 experiences seems, at this distance, an echo of the inevitable loss of the "visionary gleam"—"Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"—evoked in "Intimations of Immortality."[51]

Across the Atlantic from Wordsworth, the antebellum transcendentalists, many of whom were deeply influenced by him, had also fashioned an aesthetic that was grounded in moments of inspiration, as its adherents struggled to find forms that captured those moments despite their suspicion that no art could do

so very successfully, or for very long. Like their English counterparts, the transcendentalists defended the validity of moments of insight found in nature, reading, conversation, or meditation as routes to truth—for their part, in a New England culture steeped both in Protestant hostility to spiritual traditions of mysticism and in Enlightenment skepticism about religious (or any kind of) enthusiasm. In this specific cultural setting—although like other romantics at home and abroad—the transcendentalists worked to shape a secular aesthetics of immediate insight that was grounded in something other than the eruption of the supernatural.

Among the transcendentalists, many of whom admired the Quakers for their spirituality, simplicity, and dedication to abolitionism, Bronson Alcott was a particularly ardent champion of mysticism. In the 1830s and 1840s, despite only sporadic employment and his family's precarious finances, Alcott collected an extensive library of texts on Christian mysticism. This collection included hundreds of works by writers like Jacob Boehme and Jeanne-Marie Guyon, collections of the mystic experiences of Julian of Norwich and Thomas à Kempis, editions of the neoplatonist writers like his favorite, Thomas Taylor, and more contemporary works like Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*. As late as 1872, when Alcott was turning toward a more conventional Christian outlook and vocabulary, he could still write in *Concord Days* that "mysticism is the sacred spark that has lighted the piety and illuminated the philosophy of all places and times."[52]

As befitted a group of intellectuals whose vocabulary borrowed heavily from Protestant Christianity, the transcendentalists shaped a secularized post-Christian mysticism that privileged moments of illumination. What was most striking for the transcendentalists was the momentary suspension of self, the fleeting state of being immersed in something deeper or larger than the self, an experience in which the self was no longer in control. This self-emptying, as Lindsay Blair points out, constitutes one of the most striking parallels between Cornell's psychology and that of the transcendentalists.[53] Emerson's moment of illumination reported in "Nature" is the most often quoted: "Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all."[54] Henry Thoreau experienced a similar out-of-body experience recorded in his journal for 1838: "If with closed ears and eyes I consult consciousness for a moment, immediately are all walls and barriers dissipated, earth rolls from under me, and I float, by the impetus derived from the earth and the system, a subjective, heavily-laden thought, in the midst of an unknown and infinite sea. . . . I am a restful kernel in the magazine of the universe."[55]

Thoreau found such moments of fresh perception stimulated by the natural environment, plunging deep into his own memory and consciousness as he

plunged into the woods and fields around Concord. "I seem to be nearer to the origin of things. There is something creative and primal in the cool mist. . . . Ah, that life that I have known! How hard it is to remember what is most memorable. . . . I can sometimes recall to mind the quality, the immortality of my youthful life, but in memory is the only relation to it."[56] Recalling a walk in the "meditative woods" one Thanksgiving Day, Margaret Fuller wrote to Jane Tuckerman that "all the films seemed to drop from my existence, and I was sure that I should never starve in this desert world, but that manna would drop from Heaven, if I would but rise with every rising sun to gather it."[57] Elizabeth Peabody recalled her own mystic experience in "A Vision," in which she struggles with the constant churn of art and politics over the millennia and despairs of anything that might persist through such change. For her, clinging as she sometimes did to a remnant of Christian supernaturalism, that persistence was imaged as a "Personal Presence" described in the same language the writer of John's gospel uses to describe Jesus as Messiah.[58]

Like the transcendentalists and the English romantics, Cornell sought out such experiences, which he understood, encouraged by his Christian Science orientation, to be awakenings to the spiritual harmony, the true spiritual reality, of the cosmos. Like such forebears, he preserved his mystic experiences by recording and revising them into aesthetic form. The very act of preserving them puts Cornell in company with those who saw "illumination" not only as an unpredictable flash but equally as the fruit of diligent remembering and recording. For him, both his famous boxes and his less well-known dossiers were echoes of fading moments of mystic intensity, private experience made public.

Together with his extensive reading, repeated visits to the sites near the Garden Centre, and omnivorous browsing and collecting, Cornell's "GC 44" allies him with the transcendentalist tradition, and particularly with the strand I call "fluid transcendentalism." That aspect of transcendentalism is willing to diminish the knowing/thinking self and become immersed in the vital and enchanted world of material significance. It points back in turn to the vast mystical tradition to which Cornell was likewise indebted. Richard Vine reminds us that Cornell owned a copy of Anne Fremantle's *The Protestant Mystics: An Anthology of Spiritual Experience from Martin Luther to T. S. Eliot*, and offers an image of Cornell at work at the kitchen table "with the oven door open for warmth on a winter night, or sunk deep in the morass of his cellar workshop . . . engaged in a form of worship—communing with God by seeking to replicate . . . His elegant time-within-eternity handiwork."[59] Yet unlike the panentheist Christian mystics in that anthology, for whom the divine was simultaneously within and yet separate from creation, Cornell's god was materiality itself, glowing with its own unexpected vitality.

Clustered around "GC 44" with its affinities to transcendentalism are two other works that also suggest connections to the American movement. If "GC 44" aligns well with the tradition of "fluid transcendentalism," *The Crystal Cage (Portrait of Berenice)* and *Bébé Marie* absorb that same tradition only to complicate it. These works build on the romantic and transcendentalist celebration of children and childhood as a distinctive site for illuminative and enchanted experiences, and yet also introduce strange, ironic, and disturbing elements that compromise the possibility of such experiences.

Lindsay Blair rightly points to the huge importance of childhood for Cornell's art. It may not be "the subject and source that generated all other subjects," as she asserts, but she is correct to say that "the inspirational counter-world of childhood conceived of symbolically as a place of confinement seemed to offer him a sort of security that ensured his vision was not corrupted by the world."[60] Cornell often preferred the company of children, read children's books, and designed exhibitions of books and objects solely for children. As an adult he loved games, puzzles, surprises, gifts, and wrapping paper, the same trappings of childhood that had fascinated him as a child.

As Cornell recorded the visionary moments on the road to the Garden Centre, he often framed these experiences as recoveries of some particular childhood memory. At other times he evoked a more general "spirit" of childhood or sense of connection with the past. Mention of childhood appears in the very first "GC 44" entry, "The Old Farm" where Cornell describes stopping by a "pond of water works with ↑cool↓ sequestered landscaping gardening & here ~~experienced deepest~~ ↑had one of↓ profoundest experiences a renewal of spirit associated with childhood evoked by surroundings—it seemed to go deep than this a strong sense of preexistence (rare but never to be forgotten)."[61] In August 1946 he jots down the following: "after the initial pleasant circumstances of starting to work at Garden Centre in the state of mind I was in . . . then—, the 'renaissance' by the country stream with its evocation of childhood, the American scene, all its essense . . . an overwhelmingly transcendent serene state of mind."[62] Similarly, a year earlier, a ride toward the Lawrence farm, another site for "GC 44" illuminations, brought a flood of memories: "that which is indelibly stamped in memory on the heart, in the mind's eye more than I ever can know—'pictures' that will slip thru in the years to come and overwhelm with poignant loveliness some experience seemingly routine & without signif in the press of life."[63] Cornell's early exposure to the surrealists would have supported his own fascination with the past, especially the past of childhood. In the first "Manifesto of Surrealism," André Breton writes that "children set off each day without a worry in the world. . . . the woods are white or black, one will never sleep." Only in dreams can adults return to the childhood state of primal oneness: "the mind of the man who dreams is fully satisfied by what happens to him."[64]

Similarly, the long romantic and transcendentalist celebration of children and childhood for their qualities of spontaneity, intuition, emotional and physical freedom, and often uncanny wisdom appears in Cornell's work as well. The child is a reminder of the "Divine Synthesis," according to Bronson Alcott, "relics of an age of innocence—of holiness—of purity—that neither time nor revolutions have defaced nor destroyed."[65] Building on Alcott's unpublished manuscript "Psyche," Emerson calls infancy "the perpetual Messiah, which comes into the arms of fallen men, and pleads with them to return to paradise."[66] And in an 1851 Journal entry that owes much to Wordsworth's expression of the magic of childhood in "Intimations of Immortality," Thoreau reflects on the ecstasy of his own younger days: "Methinks my present experience is nothing; my past experience is all in all. I think that no experience which I have to-day comes up to, or is comparable with, the experiences of my boyhood. And not only this is true, but as far back as I can remember I have unconsciously referred to the experiences of a previous state of existence. 'For life is a forgetting,' etc. . . . In youth, before I lost any of my senses, I can remember that I was all alive, and inhabited my body with inexpressible satisfaction."[67]

In the secular worldview developed among the transcendentalists, one that Cornell echoes, attention to children and childhood reframes the biblical narratives of prelapsarian innocence and reads the Fall as the descent into adulthood. Similarly, the (momentary) recovery of childlike innocence emerges as a form of secular salvation. All these moves, literary and theoretical, among the transcendentalists and their romantic counterparts in England and continental Europe are accompanied by an intense sense of self-awareness, an awareness that no such return is possible without adult knowingness, and are equally accompanied by powerful feelings of nostalgia.

When we turn to *Crystal Cage* and *Bébé Marie* we are prepared for more romantic idealizations of childhood, and may find such celebrations predictable, repetitious, and ideologically suspect. What viewers may not be prepared for are the qualities of irony and irreverence in these works, qualities missing in "GC 44" and often missing among the male transcendentalists. *Crystal Cage* and *Bébé Marie* require that viewers see Cornell's work not as an unproblematic celebration of a preferred stage of life, but as an argument in which childlike enchantment is evoked, only to be challenged as both naïve and subversively erotic.

The Crystal Cage appeared first as a seven-page "essay" in the surrealist journal *View* in January 1943. It purports to tell the story of young Berenice who, while visiting France with her family in 1871, comes across an abandoned pagoda. Her wealthy parents arrange for its removal to New England, and the child, "reared in a severe atmosphere of scientific research," conducts experiments from atop the tower. Although Berenice and her pagoda are fictions, there really is a "Pagode de Chanteloup," completed in 1778 for the Duc du Choiseul on his estate

in the Loire valley.[68] Following the title page is an image of a pagoda made up of hundreds of words, a calligram in the style of Apollinaire and drawn from what Sandra Starr calls "the great storehouse of Cornell's inner life from which he drew in making his art."[69] Here, as Starr has worked out, are references to ballet, music, art and artists, literary texts and writers, international locations and hotels, and terms from astronomy and natural history. Following this calligram are two letters supposedly written in September and November 1942, providing accounts of interactions with children, then an image of the "original" pagoda, an illustration of high-wire acrobat Charles Blondin, and finally a collage, *Portrait of Berenice*. In this portrait Cornell includes images of elevation and extension: angels, ballerinas, balloons, astronomical discoveries, all connected by a ribbon from the little girl at bottom and tracing upward through the page. The final image of the original article shows "Berenice of 1900 gazing into her own past and future."

Subsequently, Cornell took these original pages, added a few others, and assembled the lot into a suitcase to make a kind of traveling box. Included in the case was a note that suggests Cornell wanted to publish the Berenice collection in multiples for wider distribution. Also included was a note from August 25, 1945, labeled "Metaphysique d'Ephemera," in which he writes, "these Berenices encountered all and always unexpectedly seen for a few moments then gone forever—on subways, in a city crowd, that is the crux perhaps if they were seen too often—familiarity breeds contempt—this habit of read[ing] too much into a person on first sight especially an appealing child or young girl."[70]

The fictional Berenice of 1871 joins the other Berenices Cornell collected from his sightings of young girls in Manhattan, on Long Island, on street corners and city buses, assembling them into this essay/box. Starr describes *Crystal Cage* as a kind of treasure box, inviting viewers to open it and handle its contents. "His constructions," she writes, "are not toys for adults, nor are they children's playthings, but a bridge between the two worlds. . . . In them, the child can savor the results of innocence informed, and the adult can unload the baggage of years of conditioned response to the commonplace. . . . What if—and how quickly Cornell makes us ask ourselves that primal question—we defy our adult sense of convention and allow ourselves to become the innocent, curious child?"[71]

Missing in Starr's otherwise brilliant essay are the ways in which *Crystal Cage* challenges the very romantic conventions of childhood that it apparently celebrates. The title itself is provocative. Perhaps Cornell was just being alliterative, but such a lover of wordplay would have grasped the connotations of "cage." This is, after all, not a "box," connected to Cornell's assemblages. His boxes, as Richard Vine observes, were efforts to take ordinary objects out of the flux of time and "to intimate a realm that is unchanging and perfect. . . . his grids

and drawers [within the boxes] imply not prisonlike containment but a distinctly Cornellian dialogue between singularity and mass identity, privacy and public display."[72] Boxes may paradoxically open up possibilities through their very containment, raise questions about "in here" and "out there," about what is temporal and what aspires to another dimension. Cornellian boxes are, in this sense, never complete, but always works in progress. But "cage" feels more ominous. "Cage" suggests forms of voyeurism, the one inside vulnerable to the fate of enclosure and subject to constant surveillance. "Cage" also suggests the romantic and Victorian fascination with the bodies of children that verges on (or becomes) the perverse and pedophilic: placing children under the lens of the emerging sciences of child psychology and evolutionary biology, or under the equally agenda-driven gaze of poets and novelists—the child as specimen, exhibit, and evidence.[73]

Then, as if Berenice and her many avatars were sentenced to the cage of childhood, the last page of the *View* article shows Berenice as a child in 1900 looking into a window, presumably of the pagoda, "gazing into her own past and future." But this Berenice is not in her late thirties or early forties, as would be the case with the ordinary passage of time, but still a child. The logic of this caption seems to be that Berenice has neither past nor future, but will be perpetually a child in Cornell's imagination. This is consonant with what we know of his penchant for observing and sometimes befriending adolescent girls and young women and his avoidance of romantic/sexual relationships with adult women.

Finally, we come to the name Cornell chose for his heroine. Berenice is the name of a comet; it is also the title of one of Edgar Allan Poe's most gothic tales. Poe, who was baffled by the transcendentalists' sometimes sunny optimism and convinced (however mistakenly) that they had greater access to the literary and publishing circles of Boston and Cambridge, in contrast to his own desperate search for work as a hard-pressed journalist, appears often in Cornell's writing. In 1947, for example, in working on an entry for the journal *Dance Index*, Cornell came across a reference in Poe's "Marginalia" to the opera singer Maria Malibran. "This a subtle association ~~always~~ evoked by the sharp morning and clear light," Cornell wrote in "GC 44." "The finding of the Poe transcended the occasion of locating material for Dance Index in the way in which other parts of the MARGINALIA, 'fancies of fancies, etc,' fitted my preoccupations with the display in the bakery across the street."[74] Closer to home, in the *View* version of *Crystal Cage*, Cornell writes (in italics): "Pagode De Chanteloup—The reader will search in vain in the literature of the past for briefest mention of this neglected phenomenon, and the conclusion may be drawn that it was pigeonholed with the countless hoaxes that abounded in the scientific field during the past century, of which E. A. Poe's 'Balloon Hoax' is a classic example." This account may itself

be a hoax, since the Duc de Choiseul's pagoda was real, a turnabout that Poe, the author of a faux-journal account of the crossing of the Atlantic in a hot-air balloon, would have found delicious.

But while Poe's "Balloon Hoax" is lightly satirical of the Anglo-American fascination with inventions, his story "Berenice" is anything but light. The protagonist Egaeus is obsessed with the beauty of his beloved, and especially with her perfect teeth. Berenice (who is also Egaeus's cousin) falls ill, experiencing trances that seem to mimic death. After one harrowing epileptic fit, her servants prepare her for burial. Overcome by grief and in the grip of mental instability, Egaeus opens her coffin and extracts her teeth. As he comes to his senses, Egaeus is led to the shocking truth that Berenice was in fact not dead when this dental horror was performed. The box he had been holding drops from his hands "and from it, with a rattling sound, there rolled out some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor."[75] Had Poe seen *Crystal Cage*, he might have wondered whether Cornell, who in so many ways was a rightful heir of the romantic and transcendentalist celebrations of the child, was having a grim little joke at their expense and his own, naming his heroine after the mutilated and toothless heroine of Poe's shocking story.

Sometime in the early 1940s, Cornell set aside some ongoing box projects when he found a large doll that had been in his family for many years, an imported French toy dressed in elegant nineteenth-century clothes. His sister Elizabeth had played with the doll and considered it hers, although it really belonged to their second cousin Ethel Storms. But the adult Joseph appropriated it for his own uses—"I kidnapped it from her trunk in the basement"—and began to reimagine "Bébé," as they had called it.[76] He fashioned a screen of branches behind which Bébé now stood and framed the doll and her screen in a signature wooden box. Bébé now had a new life, or rather a second and parallel life: she still existed as a doll, but now also existed as a work of art. As a child's toy, the doll evoked memories of childhood and child's play for any viewer, including and especially Cornell himself, for whom childhood was such a precious and privileged moment. As an artwork, *Bébé Marie* (to use her new title) likewise recalled childhood, but childhood now placed behind a fence, just beyond reach, childhood eroticized (though Cornell might resist this interpretation), desirable because unavailable through convention or repression. As *Bébé Marie*, the Cornell family doll had become a material reminder of the chain of associations known most fully to Cornell himself, but now overheard, as it were, by viewers who might develop similar chains of association. Ultimately, the doll is located in a culture with its own distinctive and often contradictory ideas about children and childhood. *Bébé Marie* is thus a complicated site in which literary, historical, and

cultural associations and assumptions are mapped onto Cornell's own memories, obsessions, and aesthetic disposition.

When Cornell's art seems most childlike, as in *Crystal Cage* or *Bébé Marie*, then it is likely to be most contrived, most arranged. In this way, he is not so far from the sardonic send-ups of his surrealist peers. While it is true that Cornell often preferred the company of children, behaved in a childlike (often childish) fashion, and created assemblages that seemed toy-like, his aesthetic was a matter of choice and arrangement rather than naïveté or lack of skill. Focusing on children and childhood was an expression of his worldview, as was "GC 44." Putting Cornell's preferences that way allows us to see that, like his predecessors among the English romantics and American transcendentalists, and like the French romantics whom he more overtly cited, those preferences were far from simple, far from self-evident, and far from obviously virtuous.

"The Romantic discourse of the child," as Judith Plotz calls it, equates the figure of the child with an undivided consciousness, an openness to nature, a preternatural wisdom, and a powerfully creative imagination. Essentialized beings, children become the carriers of a set of preferred values that romantics wanted adults to develop or recover. What this discourse often (though not always, as with Blake) avoided was the reality of most children's lives in the late eighteenth century or indeed in nearly every age. "The discourse of these children of history . . . is antithetical to Romantic discourse," Plotz writes. "By a kind of domestic orientalism, the homeless masses—waifs, strays, Nobody's Children, mudlarks, guttersnipes, pariahs, and arabs—are represented as an alien element within western civilization. Non-western, non-Christian, uncivilized, outcast, these children are more a source of fear than of either love or pity."[77]

Some of the American transcendentalists reflected this same romantic confusion between the values they wished for in adults and the traits they projected onto children. In Alcott's Temple School, for example, the emphasis was on cultivating children's spontaneous and individualized responses rather than on rote memorization and collective recitation. However, it soon became clear that not all responses were equally valued. Alcott's assistant Elizabeth Peabody was distressed at the way Alcott enforced a kind of moral surveillance among his young charges rather than respecting their individual personalities, family circumstances, and "rights of reserve," as she put it. Theory seemed to be getting the better of experience.[78] In the same vein, Alcott's celebration of his own children as divine messengers soon went sour when his second-born Louisa proved to be undivinely willful. Then Louisa and her mother Abigail became "she-devils" to the exhausted and frustrated Bronson. Louisa's entire childhood became a battleground between her own sense of self and her father's ideological

commitment to the notion of children as angelic beings sent for the salvation of adults, except when they are not.

Seventy years later, Cornell's own childhood seems not quite the ideal time that he or his sister Betty would recall. While there is no disputing their happy memories or the comfort those memories provided, we are also struck by the picture of a family riven by a son's and brother's disability, a father's illness, absence, and death, and a precipitous decline in financial security. Perhaps Cornell valorized childhood and created rich imaginative interiors precisely because so much of that childhood was insecure and his adult life on Utopia Parkway so dreary.

So, how might we read *Bébé Marie*? It is a fashion doll, not a rag doll, and so reminds viewers of the ways children are shaped by their class origins and circumstances. It is a female doll, with all of its gendered implications. It is a family doll, evoking for that family a distinctive set of experiences and evoking for others their own memories of toys, including dolls, from their own pasts. Then, it is a doll placed behind a web of branches and enclosed in a frame, sealing off this youthful image in a timeless realm, protected from experiences of aging, sexuality, and death, and at the same time ironically rendering the female figure more desirable because less accessible. In the end, *Bébé Marie* is the portrait of a perfectly dead child. The best child, this disturbing work suggests, the quietest, most refined, most amenable to adult fantasies, is the dead child. Indeed, a few years after enclosing the doll in her thicket, Cornell took her out and had some pictures taken. One of these, says Lindsay Blair, shows the doll lying "flat, covered with autumnal leaves, as if abandoned."[79]

Bébé Marie exists not just as an artwork in the Museum of Modern Art (now back behind her thicket) but also in a set of photographs. In a photo taken in the 1930s, Cornell is shown sitting cross-legged, looking over his shoulder at the doll before it was transformed into an art object. Around 1970, another photo was taken of Cornell and the doll. This one, by Duane Michals, shows the artist in his bedroom. Over Joseph's shoulder is a picture of French actress Jeanne Moreau, fingers in her mouth. Cornell also has a finger in his mouth. This is simultaneously a childlike gesture and an adult's erotic, provocative one that twists Cornell's lips into a kind of smirk. Between his widespread legs is the boxed and twigged *Bébé Marie*, and on top of the box is a preserved grasshopper in a bottle. Michals explained that this was a reference to the recently released film *The Grasshopper*, starring Jacqueline Bisset, one of Cornell's favorite actresses.[80]

Whether Cornell or Michals intended or not, this 1970 photograph reveals the complicated "discourse of the child" that the artist has inherited from his romantic and transcendentalist ancestors. Here, "innocence" is at the service of

its maker. What appeared as a kind of protection of the childhood imago/doll by enclosing it in a wall of twigs and surrounding it with a box may equally be seen as a form of permanently enforced powerlessness, with the doll now as trapped as the grasshopper. Turning this thought around once more, that enclosed child/imago is a reflection of Cornell himself, an evocation and then a deconstruction of his fantasy childhood.

Cornell wanted to distance himself from the surrealists of the 1920s and 1930s, preferring a kind of "white magic" art to their more erotic, provocative, and satirical juxtapositions. At times he seemed to embrace a naïve approach to his art, relying on "sparks" of inspiration that would, without intervention, fuse his collections of objects, memories, and eclectic reading into artistic assemblages and dossiers. His work sometimes seems childlike and spontaneous, much like his personal life, fascinated as he was by toys, cards, games, and the company of children. Yet this was no simple naïveté, but rather a cultivated innocence, a second childhood with all the self-consciousness of adulthood. His art mixes the playful and the self-aware in equal and sometimes unsettling measure. Cornell loved to spot attractive young people from a distance, calling them his *fées*, or fairies. He idolized ballerinas and movie stars and starlets. Mary Ann Caws calls Cornell's fascination with girls and young women "eros contained," suggesting that the artist "collected" glimpses of these attractive people but did not cross the line into abuse.[81] In our more suspicious and protective time, such behavior would be cause for alarm and intervention. But Cornell's behavior with children skirted legal difficulties. It was as if a fairy-tale protective cloak had been thrown over this odd, unworldly/worldly, celibate man, much as he threw the cloak of innocence over childhood, transforming real children and young people, with all their angry, difficult, recalcitrant, fickle, and winsome ways, into perfectly formed and sexually unaware creatures.

In these ways, Cornell inherits the object-oriented, material, "enchanted" preferences of a few nineteenth-century transcendentalists whose tradition I call "fluid." He shares with them an aesthetic in which the thinking self is subsumed in the material world, the ego dissolving in a newly enchanted cosmos existing through its own agency. At the same time, Cornell argues with these mystic and transcendental moments of childlike self-abnegation by reading them, remembering them, through the adult lens. The adult may not desire the child to be the unselfconscious conduit of moments of enchantment, but may desire the child in other respects.

Psychologizing Cornell this way may be fascinating and even instructive, but it may also serve to dismiss him and his work as aberrations, sidelights to the larger cultural flows that seem to leave romanticism and its practices behind. But Cornell, so difficult to label and compartmentalize, so strange in his artis-

tic method, may in a different light be seen as part of large cultural continuities: his work inherited a European romantic literary and philosophical tradition that includes Rousseau, Madame de Staël, Schiller, Mallarmé, and Nerval, and the English and American romantic traditions, including American transcendentalism. Cornell threw all these influences into his creative hopper, together with his overflowing collections of words and objects.

While Cornell seems not to have taken note of them as a collective influence, the American transcendentalists had been there before him. A century earlier they shaped an aesthetic and a philosophy by borrowing widely from English, European, and non-Western traditions. They pulled together Wordsworth, Coleridge, Kant, Goethe, Schiller, Greek myths, and Asian philosophy. They were inveterate clippers, savers, samplers, copiers, quoters of passages from all manner of sources, whether or not (and often not) they understood those works or their contexts very well. In this way, Cornell doubled the influence, however subterranean, of the transcendentalists: they chose their materials from the mountain of cultural traditions and artifacts at their disposal; Cornell did the same, thus oddly magnifying their influence.

SIX } *Truman Nelson: Rage*

From the mid-1830s to the start of the Civil War, transcendentalist writers and reformers were regularly lambasted as atheists, cranks, freethinkers, and radicals. Often maligned in their own time, theirs is precisely the tradition that mid-twentieth-century working-class novelist and polemicist Truman Nelson would vigorously embrace. Nelson, champion of John Brown's activism and the social critiques of Henry Thoreau, saw in nineteenth-century transcendentalism an American tradition of radical cultural criticism reborn in the mid-twentieth century. Nelson's work illustrates the way many Americans from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s found in transcendentalism not only a crucial piece of literary and social history but, even more, a valuable resource in movements for social change and individual expression.

Transcendentalism certainly did not expire in the post–Civil War decades. It was the subject of protracted debate among Free Religionists; it hovered over the Concord School of Philosophy as a shaping (and, for some, unhealthy) influence; it braced Elizabeth Peabody in her advanced years for further reform on behalf of kindergarten-age children and indigenous people; it prompted Caroline Dall, Ednah Dow Cheney, and Julia Ward Howe to keep Margaret Fuller's name in front of feminists and other reformers. Transcendentalist figures were memorialized, and some were ossified, in the pages of scores of biographies and reminiscences published in the last decades of the century.

Still, for some reformers, activists, and intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century, transcendentalism's experimental and episodic method seemed insufficiently rigorous, its surviving members' frequent recourse to grand generalizations on the one hand and preference for individual solutions equally useless in a new era with new social strains and new scientific insights. To these observers, transcendentalism appeared to be a moribund movement: awash in reminiscence, afraid of controversy, ambivalent about its own radical heritage, and fatally subject to dismissive humor.

At least, this is what George Santayana thought at the beginning of the new century. Reflecting this understanding of a movement gone to seed, Santayana called it one of the sources of a "genteel tradition" in American thought. In an address delivered to the Philosophical Union of the University of California at Berkeley in August 1911, Santayana contrasted the "American Will," which con-

quered the continent and created a new built environment, with the "American Intellect," which, as he put it, "has floated gently in the backwater." For Santayana, the sources of such outmoded American thinking were twofold: one, a kind of attenuated Calvinism that continued to focus on the drama of the individual soul, the "agonized conscience." The other has been transcendentalism, not so much a system or set of facts as a method, "a point of view from which any world, no matter what it might contain, could be approached by a self-conscious observer. . . . Knowledge, it says, has a station, as in a watchtower; it is always seated here and now, in the self of the moment. The past and the future, things inferred and things conceived, lie around it, painted as upon a panorama. They cannot be lighted up save by some centrifugal ray of attention and present interest, by some active operation of the mind." Much as he admired this method and made use of it, Santayana argued that the transcendental method tells us nothing about the world beyond the self. Even Emerson, noteworthy for his "love and respect for nature," saw the natural world as a projection of the self, Santayana claimed, likely on the basis of a reading of *Nature*. It would take a William James, he thought, steeped in the romantic and transcendentalist heritage, to break the grip of the genteel tradition and pivot American thinking to an engagement with the material world.[1]

Santayana's critique of transcendentalism paralleled those offered by the New Humanists and the Young Americans, whose male-only versions of the movement have already appeared in the discussion of Charles Ives in chapter 4. But the disparagement offered by Irving Babbitt and Van Wyck Brooks, among others, and Santayana's dismissal of transcendentalism as a source of the genteel tradition were not the only versions of the nineteenth-century movement on offer in the early twentieth. In Santayana's wake, both the New Humanists and the Young Americans were equally appalled by transcendentalism, but for Lewis Mumford the main stream of American writing in the period he called "the golden day" was exactly transcendentalist. The first page of the typescript to *The Golden Day* reads: "Transcendentalism was a criticism of a fossilized past; it did not anticipate that the future might turn out quite as bad." Mumford struck out the second clause and rewrote it in pencil as "it was an inner transformation of the Puritan will to power with a will to perfection." In fact, Mumford argues, "At heart, the American novelists were all transcendental. . . . Even Poe—who sneered at Concord—was equally a Transcendentalist. . . . These writers were lost in the inactual: sin, death, eternity—these held their minds, not 'chops and tomato sauce.'"[2]

In the first decades of the twentieth century, with the powerful exception of Charles Ives's *Essays before a Sonata* and the interest generated by the first public performances of the *Concord* Sonata in its entirety, transcendentalism increas-

ingly became part of American *literary* history, writers talking about writers to other writers. In some hands, the transcendentalists shared the stage with other antebellum figures, and new literary periods were invented to describe new constellations of writers and styles. Whether transcendentalist or not, Melville and Poe shared space with Emerson and Thoreau in Mumford's delineation of a kind of Camelot of American writing. F. O. Matthiessen bundled Emerson and Thoreau with Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, and, in an epilogue, with T. S. Eliot, as participants in or heirs to an "American Renaissance."[3] But if transcendentalism now lived largely in scholarly or critical discourse, its depictions were not immune from the larger cultural and political environment. In the second volume of *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927), Vernon Parrington places his chapter "The Genesis of Transcendentalism" after a section on social criticism in early nineteenth-century America and before individual treatments of Emerson, Thoreau, Parker, and Fuller. Written in the long slide away from the Progressive politics of the earlier twentieth century and before the revival of social democracy in the 1930s, Parrington's treatment of the transcendentalists acknowledged their stress on mystic illumination and the value of self-trust. At the same time, Parrington saw that same self-trust as provocative of social criticism. "They were impatient of any falling short of the ideal, and their lives in consequence became an open indictment of a Yankee world given over to materialism. . . . [Their social criticism] might be severe, but it was honest and intelligent, and honest intelligent criticism America stood greatly in need of."[4]

In contrast, Victor Calverton argued that transcendentalism gave voice to what he called the "anarcho-individualism" of the frontier, with Emerson as "prophet of the petty bourgeoisie." Rather than seeing the movement as imitative of European and English philosophical arguments, Calverton saw it as responsive to distinctively American circumstances. For this Marxist writer, "the individualistic impulse which, accelerated by the spirit of the frontier, swept over America like a predatory invader," obscuring the fact that social cooperation, on the frontier as elsewhere, was essential for individual and social survival.[5] Written in the slough of the Great Depression, Calverton's *The Liberation of American Literature* anticipated Truman Nelson's sense, in the 1950s and 1960s, that transcendentalism's instinctive preference for self-culture might have made sense in an earlier era (at least for those who benefited from such a celebration) but was irrelevant in an age of collective identity and social struggle.

How transcendentalism—its ideas, its witness, its writers and writings—reentered mid-century American and international environments beyond those inhabited by scholars and critics is the matter of the pages that follow. Here, the main example of this reengagement is the life and work of radical activist and novelist Truman Nelson. But Nelson's work lived in a larger cultural environ-

ment that witnessed a variety of transcendentalist re-emergings. He is valuable for an understanding of the fate of one strand of transcendentalism in the twentieth century, the strand that is most deeply engaged in projects for human flourishing and least patient with any sense of the "more than" dimension of human life. Nelson's Marxism sits uncomfortably with the post-Christian spirituality of the movement whose figures he admired. They refused to jettison a language of spirit and spirituality and sought to make that language relevant to projects for human improvement. In contrast, he saw religious and spiritual language and belief as superstitious nonsense and (as Marx did) signs of humanity's captivity to false consciousness. Nelson's secular take on transcendentalism would see the movement as liberating humanity from that false consciousness and substituting, as he wrote at the end of *The Sin of the Prophet*, "FAITH IN MAN." Still, while Nelson's emphasis throughout his career was on "human flourishing," we may even, in passages in *The Sin of the Prophet* and *The Surveyor*, catch glimpses of the post-human materialism that is the minor strand of nineteenth-century transcendentalism, one that would find fuller expression in writers like Annie Dillard and, at times, Mary Oliver, and in the work of ecocritics and new materialists.

Although he would later incur the rage of the working-class Nelson for his Ivy League hauteur and sense of privilege, Harvard literary historian Perry Miller shared the conviction that transcendentalism was a radical movement of cultural criticism. In his introduction to the anthology *The Transcendentalists* (1950), Miller proposed that the nineteenth-century movement was part of a larger American tradition of religious radicalism, "a protest of the human spirit against emotional starvation." Transcendentalists' revolt against what Emerson attacked as "corpse-cold Unitarianism" was, in Miller's words, "the first of a succession of revolts by the youth of America against American Philistinism." These revolts, Miller observed, struck "the elder victims as the surrender of the national birthright and as a reprehensibly un-American activity."[6] Miller's line about "un-American activity" was a not-too-subtle reference to the anticommunism of the post–World War Two years, which would eventuate in the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee and its Senate counterpart chaired by Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy. Fear of guilt by association drove cultural critics and artists underground, to other countries, or to other lines of work. While many Americans agreed with the anticommunist crusade and found refuge in a newly energized employment climate, others seethed inwardly, feeling disaffected from national values of material abundance and American exceptionalism.

Still, for Miller, transcendentalism disappeared as a viable cultural force not so much because its ideas had become invalid, but because of mainstream so-

ciety's unrelenting hostility, a hostility that he appeared to link to the "Philistinism" against which transcendentalists revolted:

> It must therefore be insisted upon that if Transcendentalism did not remain a disturbing force, the reason is not alone that America adopted it and made it orthodox, but also that it consumed, shattered, and destroyed its adherents. . . . Emerson dissolved into aphasia, Ripley subsided into disillusion, Hedge became a Harvard professor, and Jones Very kept himself out of the lunatic asylum only by writing versified platitudes on the Atlantic cable. Brownson became a Catholic, as did Sophia Ripley, and Elizabeth Peabody became a "character. . . . J. S. Dwight became the dean of Boston music critics, and Ellery Channing spent a life of futility.[7]

Miller's theory of declension fits the approach taken by Santayana, for whom transcendentalism was equated with a refusal to engage with the new material conditions of American life and thus became irrelevant and "genteel." But Charles Ives would vehemently disagree, finding in transcendentalism a powerful and living inspiration for his art. Joseph Cornell was a transcendentalist manqué, his "secularity" a mid-twentieth-century echo of their distinctive version of the secular impulse in its mutual engagement of the material with the immaterial dimensions of ordinary life. In larger American culture and society, by the mid-twentieth century movements for social change would, explicitly or implicitly, claim transcendentalist writers and ideas as models and inspirations.

The Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 built on earlier efforts to desegregate American institutions and unleashed a decade and a half of ceaseless activity on behalf of African Americans' civil rights. Among the several strands that made up the civil rights movement—its long history in the antislavery struggle, its deep roots in the black community and equally deep roots in the black church—were the key texts and witness of antebellum transcendentalism. Thoreau's night in jail in protest of the Mexican War, his essays "Resistance to Civil Government," later more popularly called "Civil Disobedience," and "Slavery in Massachusetts," Emerson's essays "Self-Reliance" and "Divinity School Address," transcendentalists' embrace (some more promptly than others) of abolitionism—all these resonated with twentieth-century civil rights activists and became part of an American tradition they claimed. Even toward the middle and end of the 1960s, when some activists criticized nonviolent civil disobedience as theory and practice, transcendentalism assumed new relevance in the conspiracy of several of its adherents in raising funds for John Brown's armed raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in 1859.

No figure from the antebellum movement had more impact on the emerging civil rights movement than Henry Thoreau. Thoreau's influence both on the

world of writing and on the world beyond writing has been varied since his death in 1862. Thoreau has turned successive faces to generations of readers and admirers: Emerson's disciple, ceaseless and brilliant writer, botanist, self-reliant individualist, advocate of civil disobedience in defense of a "higher law," early environmentalist. While Thoreau was not always attentive to the social reforms of his era, and while he did not always embrace nonviolence as a form of resistance (as in his spirited defense of Brown's resort to violence against slavery), it was Thoreau's personal resistance to injustice and his essay "Civil Disobedience" that recommended him to civil rights activists.

Martin Luther King Jr. first encountered Thoreau's writing while an undergraduate at Morehouse College in the mid-1940s. Later in his brief life, King recalled Thoreau's influence:

> During my early college days I read Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience for the first time. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I re-read the work several times. I became convinced then that non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. No other person has been more eloquent and passionate in getting this idea across than Henry David Thoreau. As a result of his writings and personal witness we are the heirs of a legacy of creative protest. It goes without saying that the teachings of Thoreau are alive today, indeed, they are more alive today than ever before. Whether expressed in a sit-in at lunch counters, a freedom ride into Mississippi, a peaceful protest in Albany, Georgia, a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, it is an outgrowth of Thoreau's insistence that evil must be resisted and no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice.[8]

For King and others in the movement, Thoreau's writing and witness intersected and reinforced that of Mohandas Gandhi, whose work King had also encountered during his education. Thoreau himself was influenced by Indian philosophy and scriptures, including the Bhagavad Gita. In turn, Gandhi read Thoreau's most famous essay during his several times in jail (1908, 1909, 1913) in South Africa, imprisoned for acts of civil disobedience. From Gandhi's struggles against racism and imperialism in South Africa and India, King learned the concepts and practices of *satyagraha*, truth or soul force, and *ahimsa*, nonviolent resistance to injustice, and blended these with what he absorbed from his readings of Thoreau.[9]

King's most famous essay, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963), echoes and builds on his immersion in the work of Thoreau and Gandhi. In jail for leading a civil rights demonstration, King wrote this essay in response to eight prominent white "liberal" clergy who had called on him to let the struggle for equal rights and access play out in the court system and who accused him of fomenting civil strife. How is it, they asked, that a movement whose leaders

urged obedience to *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 would turn to lawbreaking in 1963? For King, the answer is clear: "there are *just* and there are *unjust* laws. I would agree with Saint Augustine that 'An unjust law is no law at all.'" "A just law," he went on, "is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. . . . Any law that uplifts human personality is just."[10]

King drew his examples of people willing to violate unjust law for the sake of a higher law or truth from biblical history, the passion narratives in the gospels, church history, and the participation of the black church and its leaders in recent demonstrations. These examples were particularly directed toward the religious leaders who had so criticized him. "Letter" implicitly echoes more secular sources and inspirations, including Thoreau's "Slavery in Massachusetts" (1854). There, Thoreau invokes "higher law" not only to condemn the return of runaway slave Anthony Burns, but to argue that freedom is, or should be, the birthright and cornerstone of all human life. Trusting in a legal system to get things right is itself a form of slavery. "The law will never make men free; it is men who have got to make the law when the government breaks it."[11] As Albert von Frank phrases it in his account of the Burns episode, "the law becomes a system whereby people, having ceded questions of right and wrong to petty officials, are thrust into a position of merely hoping that right will prevail—a situation that does not, in Thoreau's view, accord with the original relation of free men to the moral world."[12] We hear an echo of Thoreau's emphasis on the priority of higher law in King's words: "If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands."[13]

As the civil rights movement in the South gathered force, first with the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955–56, the sit-ins and Freedom Rides in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and then the drive to register Southern black voters in 1962–65, transcendentalist texts and transcendentalist witness escaped the college curriculum and entered the secular world in new ways. Working with Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee volunteers in Oxford, Ohio, as they prepared to go south in 1964 and face resistance, violence, and possible death, child psychiatrist Robert Coles was struck by the way texts and artworks interacted with social struggle: "I heard the folk songs. I heard the poems, the selections from John Donne and Shakespeare and Dostoevsky and Thoreau and Tolstoy and W. H. Auden. I heard the phonographs play Beethoven and Brahms and Berlioz. . . . I was astonished at the sight of those books: *The Plague*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Light in August*, *The Mind of the South*, *All the King's Men*, the poems of Wallace Stevens or W. C. Williams or W. H. Auden."[14]

In his own way, Truman Nelson had been tracking the emergence of the struggle for civil rights and social equality in his work as an activist and a writer. Nelson was born in 1911 to a working-class family in Lynn, Massachusetts, where his father worked as a barber. Nelson dropped out of high school, found a place briefly in the Federal Theatre Project as a "highly unsuccessful playwright," as he put it, working at the Mercury Theatre under Orson Welles. In the late 1930s he began working at the General Electric plant in Lynn. A union organizer and official, Nelson's leftist politics were cemented by his membership in the Communist Party from 1935 to 1946, a membership that would cost his wife Helen Maria Nelson her security clearance at GE in May 1955. Nelson wrote a long poem called "False to King Ahab," which he sent to Little, Brown publishers. Little, Brown rejected it, but sympathetic editor and fellow party member Angus Cameron encouraged him to keep writing and send them something else. Truman and Helen's friendship with Cameron would also prove costly when the editor was identified by the FBI informant Herbert Philbrick as "an important member" of the party.[15]

Seventy years later, poet Vincent Ferrini would recall that Nelson's strong will was reinforced by the discipline and ideology enforced by the party. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, they were both teaching at Lesley College in Boston and became friends.

> He became a leftist, and I joined him, but not for long. I found out that what he was adhering to was the church of politics; we'd go to a meeting there, and he'd come back with the details from Russia. . . . I found that disturbing. Why should I follow a line that they set down for me, that excludes me, so we had a problem between Truman and myself, and so he says, when the revolution comes, we'll put you up against the wall and shoot you. . . . It was hard for me to follow a line. But he could follow a line because he knew that that was the cause that would bring the changes. He had a line, the philosophy, an idea, knew where you were going, and how to get there. . . . [H]e was monolithic.[16]

Cameron's encouragement coincided with Nelson's encounter with Harvard literary historian F. O. Matthiessen, possibly hearing him speak at a Henry Wallace rally in 1948. Nelson had been looking for a mentor, as he recalled in his autobiographical fragment "On Creating Revolutionary Art," and Matthiessen seemed just the right person, with his socialist credentials and his deep knowledge of American literature and culture in the early and mid-nineteenth century, a time when, Nelson thought, ideas and expression powerfully interacted with efforts at social change.

Nelson armed himself with working-class pride and introduced himself to Matthiessen as a factory worker, insisting on paying for tutorial sessions on

antebellum New England's history and literature. Recounting this crucial meeting, Nelson wrote that "Matthiessen told me he already had too many pupils but that I must put away my money and come to him as a friend and from that day on he never let go of my hand or hesitated to put his own work aside to talk to me and cheer me on. When I finished my first draft he took it with him on his last weekend in the country and the notes on the margin are probably the last gift we have from his gentle perceptions."[17] Nelson could only meet with Matthiessen on Sundays, and spent evenings reading and writing at the Boston Public Library and other libraries, "a dreadful ordeal" that put great strain on his family life.

Nelson's radical background and his rage at the rightward turn in American politics in the late 1940s and early 1950s propelled him to look for a buried radical element in the national past. He found such an element in the forced return of runaway slave Anthony Burns, who had sought refuge in Boston in 1854, and the resistance of Massachusetts abolitionists to federal officials bent on enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act. The large historical moment, with its urgent issues of sectionalism, slavery, westward expansion, abolitionism, constitutional interpretation, and national identity itself, would intersect with the "prophet" in the title of his historical novel, *The Sin of the Prophet*, Unitarian clergyman, transcendentalist, and scholar Theodore Parker. Nelson was determined to get everything into his rapidly expanding manuscript—Parker's personal history, health, and theology, Boston's local politics, New England transcendentalism, as well as the national issues that were simultaneously at stake. Faced with such a monumental task, Nelson's anxiety was high and so was his need for reassurance from his mentor Matthiessen.

> Would it be possible to see you or send you some material to look over before you pull up stakes for the summer? I want this thing to be good and the vastness of the theme frightens me. This time I want you to bear down on my style, if any. I know you let me off lightly the last times. I figure I'll have to do a rewrite job all the way through after it's finished anyway. . . . But all the bad parts I can eliminate now will make the thing easier to polish off. It's maddening to be able to work only one day a week on it. To add to my complications I have been transferred in the shop to a job requiring steady and back-breaking physical labor and I get panicy at the thought that my phiscal reserve will get used up and I'll strike a creative slump in the middle of this thing. So my motto now is work for the night is coming.[18]

Matthiessen supported the project and promised to review it in the *New York Times*. But criticized for his leftist politics by the press and many of his Harvard colleagues in that emerging Cold War climate, fearful of being outed as a homosexual, and tormented by the prospect of an upcoming hearing before the Mc-

Carthy Senate select committee, Matthiessen committed suicide on March 31, 1950. Nelson turned to Harry Levin, another Harvard literature professor, for confirmation of his project. "I don't know how much I should cut out of it, how much I should rewrite to make it more 'popular.' . . . How much to conform to the current shape of the novel?"[19] Levin encouraged Nelson to press on. So did Angus Cameron, who sent the manuscript novel to historian Richard Boyer in August 1950. Boyer responded with four pages of densely written commentary, mostly praising the novel as a "considerable achievement, one that approaches greatness." "Who is this guy?" Boyer asked. "What does he do and think? Where did he get his money to do all this work and when does he write, if he has to do other work to earn a living? At night?"[20]

Little, Brown published *The Sin of the Prophet* in 1952. Matthiessen's patronage and Levin and Boyer's encouragement did not protect Nelson from the hostility of a third Harvard professor. "The actual facts of Burns's coerced return to slavery are dramatic enough to impart a sweep to almost any account," Perry Miller wrote in the pages of the *New York Times*, "but Mr. Nelson's wooden dialogue and heavy-handed efforts to create an atmosphere of crisis swell his version into rodomontade. Theodore Parker was a great and good man. He does not need, in order that his example be taken to heart by scholars and intellectuals, to have his career turned into a lurid and sensational homily."[21] Other critics, including Richard Morris and Walter Harding, were encouraging, but Miller's review would stick in Nelson's throat. As Nelson put it, Miller "blasted the shit out of me."[22]

Today the novel is largely unknown and unread. Nelson aimed for the grand scale, elevating the struggle into a world-historical event: the vast din of the public protest meeting at Faneuil Hall, the storming of the federal courthouse, the battering down of its barred front door. Simultaneously, Nelson wanted to capture the inner turmoil of his hero Parker, struggling to maintain control over the mob and direct it, at just the right moment, into the streets and upon the courthouse. At moments, Nelson can manage these competing agendas: "The applause was louder, firmer, and the crowd began to press toward the stage. Groups swept into the corner, flanking him. There was no passage, no way at all to get through to the door. He felt like saying, Press not so upon me. He decided to end this miserable speech, the worst he had ever made . . . a speech that revealed, to all who knew him, an unhappy division in his mind and a basic reluctance somewhere behind it."[23]

But too often, Parker's "reluctance" is an indication of the novel's reluctance to care enough about its central character. Parker was a "great and good man," as Perry Miller said, but in Nelson's eyes Parker seems not quite great enough. His "sin" is never well explained, the "division" and "basic reluctance" never

fully developed. At the very end of the novel, Parker confesses to Burns, now bought out of slavery and visiting Boston, that he resented being drawn out of his study and pulpit and forced into activism on behalf of a people he had, wrongly, thought of as "ignorant and degraded."[24] This "sin" was most fully revealed in the Faneuil Hall event, where Parker was supposed to receive a signal to adjourn the meeting and direct the mob toward the courthouse. But he fails to understand the signal, and the moment for mass action is lost. "He knew he had failed. That night Faneuil Hall had been a cannon packed tight with human grapeshot and wadding and he was to be the powder in the breech. But the man with the slow-match had held his hand too long, and the shot would scatter and spend itself long before it reached the Courthouse. And now it was no longer a weapon pointed at wrong, but an untidy closet, and he was an old pair of shoes at the bottom, smothered with rag-tag clothes and cast-off fripperies."[25]

But even this most dramatic moment is not effectively handled in the novel, and we are left as confused as Parker. In his own historical retelling of the Burns rendition, von Frank notes that the plan which Parker supposedly botched had, in fact, unfolded just as Thomas Wentworth Higginson and his fellow Worcester radical Martin Stowell had designed: their confederate John Swift announced that "a mob of negroes" was assaulting the courthouse and that the meeting should adjourn there.[26] Nelson's effort to implicate Parker in the rendition's failure springs not from the historical record, but from his effort to portray Parker's essential ambivalence.

If the novel finds Parker ineffective at the decisive, revolutionary moments, it treats him with more respect as a farmer's son. Nelson lingers over Parker's strong neck, his huge hands, his muscular arms. He admires Parker's familiarity with handguns and long guns. Visited by leaders of Boston's African American community, "Parker met them at his door with a pistol in his hand. He led them upstairs to his study without comment, and tossed the gun carelessly on his desk. Mr. Grimes observed with a shock that another pistol was resting on top of the Holy Bible."[27] Nelson's fascination with violence and aggressive masculinity echoes other more successful novels of the late 1940s and early 1950s like Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) and Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953).

Unlike *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison's novel published, as was *Prophet*, in 1952, which offers a richly complex portrait of a young African American man struggling with the conflicting forces of racism, racial identity, and personal ambition, Nelson's novel is largely unable to offer Anthony Burns as a plausible and sympathetic character. Rather, the novel offers some embarrassing passages of racial stereotyping, including one at the novel's end. Burns and Parker enter Boston's Music Hall and stand before a statue of Beethoven while an invisible or-

ganist plays the closing passages of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor. "In his innocence and with his tribal heritage, the bronze god of sound had twice the power of the soft compliant baby god and mother god of his faith. . . . And he was responsive, too, to the themes in counterpoint, as rich and disturbing as the exhortations of the man beside him. Had not the drumbeats of Tony's fathers surpassed these in complexity?"[28] In fact, Nelson manages to turn the black characters in his novel into stereotypes—shuffling, ineffectual, agreeable, nonconfrontational—and slights the central role of Boston's black leaders and institutions in the antislavery movement and particularly in resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act. After reading the manuscript, Richard Boyer wished that Nelson had shown "somehow that the great movement did not have as its primary dynamics the subjective urge for justice on the part of white men."[29]

Finally, though, what makes *The Sin of the Prophet* worth more than passing attention in tracing the treatment of transcendentalism in twentieth-century writing is its effort to return the language and beliefs of the nineteenth-century figures to the material, social, and political world, to embed them in the smells and sweat, shouts and tumults, cruelty and violence of mid-nineteenth-century America. When Judge Loring orders Burns's return to his owner Suttle, he complies with the Fugitive Slave Act, but inwardly despises the men who conspired to make that happen: "I know you all . . . he wanted to say . . . and can catalogue you thus: office seekers, pimps, murderers, malignants, conspirators, contractors, Custom House clerks, kept editors, slave catchers, creatures of the President, spies, bribers, compromisers, spongers, gamblers, carriers of concealed weapons, deaf men, diseased men, from the Custom House, the post office, the Marshal's office and their back yards, the whorehouses, the jails, and the almshouses."[30]

Nelson left his General Electric job in 1950 and turned full-time to writing. His next book, *The Passion by the Brook* (1953), was based on the Brook Farm episode (1841–1847). His exploration of this application of Charles Fourier's "associationist" ideas in America was, Nelson admitted, an effort to "smuggle a little sex into the social sciences" and was "written too fast" and "published too quickly." George Ripley was worth writing about, "but in comparison with the drama inherent in a genuine revolutionary crisis, Brook Farm is pretty small potatoes."[31]

Nelson was right about the "written too fast" and "published too quickly." He brought back Theodore Parker from the previous novel; *The Passion by the Brook* is set before the events of the Anthony Burns rendition and foreshadows Parker's struggles with his denomination to find a pulpit home for himself. Parker's career worries matched those of George Ripley, one of the founders of Brook Farm, who had signed off from his clergy position in Boston to reorient his ca-

reer toward direct social change. Nelson skips over the early "transcendentalist" phase of Brook Farm in one chapter, choosing instead to pick up the narrative in 1845 when the community had entered its Fourierist phase. Like *The Sin of the Prophet* and other Euro-American realist novels from the mid-nineteenth century onward, *The Passion by the Brook* explores large cultural and social themes through the struggles of individuals caught up in those changes. Here, Nelson focuses attention on Brook Farm's goal of living and working communally, with guaranteed wages and housing for its workers, in tension with the often opposing needs and desires of individuals, including those that spring from sexual and relational desire and personal ambition. Swirling around and contextualizing these intra-communal tensions are conflicts with producers and laborers competing with Brook Farm's industries, and the resistance from working-class and middle-class people, often led by their clergy, to what appeared to be sexual license and "free love" practiced in the dormitories and cottages of Brook Farm.

Nelson personalizes these conflicts by focusing on sets of relationships and interactions. Into the Fourierist community comes the married couple Lili and Edgar Gray, well-dressed, wealthy, urbanized, their motives for affiliating unclear, although early on Edgar announces that his wife is high-strung and nervous and needs a rural retreat. Lili's sexuality is magnetic for many of the men of the community, particularly eighteen-year-old Adam Smith, the oddly named farm repairman. Other couples and couplings swirl around the Grays, including the Ripleys. Nelson offers an early portrait of the latter's increasingly conflicted relationship, again mostly in sexual terms, including in his depiction of Sophia Ripley: "a tall, prim woman in her late thirties. Her face was thin and sharp, her skin clear. She moved with an angular grace but her total effect was one of animated crispness that held people off. Touch me not, her movements said."[32] George Ripley misses physical contact with Sophia, but represses his feelings and pours his energy into keeping the community functional and solvent. Eventually, as the historical record shows and Nelson follows more or less faithfully, stockholders like Hawthorne begin demanding payments on their loans, the community pours its resources into building the Fourier-faithful community dormitory and meeting hall, called the Phalanstery, which then burns to the ground, and the land is sold to the local selectmen for a poor farm.

In several ways, Nelson wished to show that Brook Farm failed because its leaders clung to old codes of behavior, especially around sexuality and relationships, and were unable to structure the more genuine and encompassing equality that Fourier imagined. This is where Nelson's vision of a truly socialist state falters, failing to grasp the historical circumstances and cultural values of early- to mid-nineteenth-century New England. Where his story has more genuine power lies in the interaction of communal values and personal needs

and desires. We see Ripley's anguish over the refusal of key transcendentalist figures like Emerson and Alcott to join his community, however sympathetic they may have been, and the conflicted and often confusing advice he receives from Parker, who also did not join. We see the devious behavior of Edgar Gray, who makes use of the farm's printing press to make flyers for his own advertising business, and eventually claims his own financial stake back from the hard-pressed community. We notice Hawthorne's demand for similar restitution, and note that he was an early, but brief, participant in the movement.

But the novel derives most of its "passion" from the energies of sexual tension and release and from the swirling debates about religion and spirituality. Truman Nelson was an omnivorous reader, so it would not be surprising if the portrayals of sex and sexuality in the novel have something to do with a familiarity with D. H. Lawrence, or perhaps it was just that these topics were on the mind of the middle-aged writer. But what is clear is that the novel, if not its author, is obsessed with the female body in all its forms and shapes, and particularly the bodies of young women. Lili Gray is the focus of the novel's obsessive gaze throughout the narrative, from our first glimpse of her as the couple arrive at the farm: "her skin was fine-grained but thick-looking and held the light as if it were covered with an indefinable golden dust or down. Every time she looked up, George's eyes drank in the cool, reflected light and then fell to her pulsing neck. He did not look down at her bosom." Later, Adam Smith watches her through a telescope as she undresses after the couple's journey: "A sudden shaft of white appeared in the middle of the back, bare shoulders appeared, clothing was splitting and coming off. . . . The hips were not full and rounded like a woman's. They sloped in a concave sweep down from the narrow waist. Then he joined them with an upward lift of his guiding hands to a pair of thighs, thighs that rose and widened like two cones, out of which came buttocks like fruit from a cornucopia. Thighs that were, from side to side, the breadth of the shoulders." Many such passages emphasize Lili's physical energy, but one in particular seems apposite. The Farm's bull Prince Albert has broken loose and is running amuck in the neighboring fields. Then, from the top of the hill, comes the bull, with Lili riding his back, "her hair flying free, gold topping the gleaming brass [of the bull's body]; her legs, bare to the seat, gleaming white against the bull's flanks. The men cheered. Lili arched her back and guided the bull with her knees right up to the barn door." The central divergence here from the Greek myth of the rape by Zeus of Europa is in Lili's apparent full participation in and enjoyment of the event.[33]

Sexual identities play out in highly programmed, heterosexist ways. Charles King Newcomb is a closeted homosexual, effeminate and bizarre; Adam Smith is charged with male sexual energy and fantasizes daily about having sex with

Lili; Edgar Ripley is sexually inhibited, shocked at one point at seeing Adam's erection, and expresses his own confusion of sex and power, toward the end of the novel, through a marital rape of Lili. Sophia Ripley is portrayed as an inhibited prude, thin like all repressed women in the novel, seemingly out of touch with her own physicality. In all these ways, the novel seems to founder on the tension between validating social stereotypes about gender and sexuality (expressed here as "the natural"), on the one hand, and seeking, on the other hand, to celebrate "human flourishing" by shaping a new, more inclusive, and less competitive social arrangement.

A similar foundering and tension exists in the novel's treatment of religion and spirituality. In much of the novel, organized religion is clearly the opposing force, driving Ripley and Parker away from their pulpits and their denominations, introducing disquieting notes of separatism within the community (as when the Fourierist "prophet" Albert Brisbane, another historical character, seeks to set up a Christian chapel in the dining room of the main house), invading the farm with the horrors of the Inquisition when Orestes Brownson comes to proselytize for Catholicism. Yet the novel (if not its author) is conflicted about the appeal of religion, and focuses that complex appeal in the figure of Sophia Ripley. In a key scene, Sophia finds Adam and Lili asleep together in a sexually suggestive pose, and recoils. At first she calls their behavior "unnatural," but then reflects that it is not, and that she somehow has missed this intimacy in her own life: "her own heart was a cold one, an unnatural one. She saw that all through her life she had never offered anything warm to anyone, anything that was not a tie through the intellect." Then, she concludes "with a kind of triumph" that her alternative is to give herself to the discipline and chastity of the Catholic Church. At Boston's Holy Cross Cathedral she finds the bishop, whose advice about finding love in service to others is remarkably astute, leading Sophia to say, "You have made me pass from death into life."[34] This passage, late in the novel, links to an earlier one in which George finds Sophia caring for Lucas, a boy whose face and body are deeply disfigured by leprosy:

> —Pray for me, Mother, he said hoarsely. . . . He held the rosary out to Sophia. —Pray for me, Mother. Pray for me.
>
> —Yes, Lucas. I will pray in my way.
>
> —My way, Mother. Pray for me my way! His voice had in it a sense of impending calamity. . . .
>
> Sophia, with a sidelong glance at George, took the rosary beads and slid them into her pocket. —Tonight, she said. —I will, Lucas.[35]

A passage like this suggests that it could be, after all, that the long-standing bond between working-class people and the Catholic Church is more socially

and spiritually redemptive than the paths offered either by the post-Christian efforts toward "human flourishing" of the transcendentalists or the materialist arrangements of the Fourierists. Still, the novel does not work these tensions out in any detail, possibly because of Nelson's own growing devotion to Marxist determinism and to a sense that religion is simply outmoded language for more powerful insights drawn from science and sociology. As he wrote to Doubleday editor Kenneth Woodward while deep in the research and writing of his John Brown novel, *The Surveyor*, discussing Brown's letters:

> They are the last great expression of a dedicated man going to a willful and shameful death secure in the faith and function of his conscience. . . . [They are] the last great expression of the Age of the Word. The last time man could mention his context with God in the doing of a desperate deed without being called a religious nut. Then came Darwinism and the Dawn. . . . Brown found himself in [a situation that] he justified in religious terms, but acted out in a practical and even scientific reality which [historian Bruce] Caton cannot understand, or does not wish to bother with.[36]

Six years after Perry Miller's dismissal of *The Sin of the Prophet* as stylistic "rodomontade," Nelson was drawn into another quarrel with the respected Harvard professor and groundbreaking historian. It was, again, a question of the legacy of transcendentalism and its figures. The occasion this time was the 1958 publication of *Consciousness in Concord*, Miller's edition of Thoreau's "lost journal" of 1840–1841. Miller's text, along with those of so many others, has long been superseded by the uniform editions of Thoreau's works issued by Princeton University Press, but its contentious introduction propelled Nelson into a storm of correspondence and other writing. (There is no evidence that Nelson and Miller ever wrote or spoke to one another or that Miller knew anything about Nelson, beyond the novel he so negatively reviewed.)

Miller had for years read Thoreau, along with transcendentalists in his circle and beyond, seriously though skeptically, though sometimes with a condescending edge, and saw their movement as essentially ending with the Civil War. Nelson saw transcendentalism as a usable legacy, part of a neglected genealogy of homegrown radicalism, finding its greatest antebellum cause in abolition and its greatest hero in John Brown.

When the Pierpont Morgan Library acquired in 1956 the pages Harrison Gray Otis Blake had misplaced sometime in the 1880s, it finally had what is still taken to be a complete set of Thoreau's manuscript journals.[37] The other thirty-eight notebooks and sheaves had already been shaped into a fourteen-volume edition by Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen and published by Houghton, Mifflin in 1906. The Morgan now turned to Perry Miller to edit the recovered text.

In his introduction to *Consciousness in Concord: The Text of Thoreau's Hitherto "Lost Journal" (1840-1841)*, Miller treats Thoreau as a brilliant, self-absorbed misanthrope. For Miller, not just the entries of 1840–1841, but all the rest of Thoreau's journals—and books—reveal a neurotically self-conscious writer determined to cultivate his art by cutting himself off from social interaction, friendship, and romantic love. What Miller called "Thoreau's transparent interest in himself" culminates, for him, in the chapter "Spring" at the close of *Walden*, where new life is seen to be springing not from some flowering meadow, but from the muck of mud and sand. Miller finds it all too symbolic. "Toward this ultimate—this derisive, tortured—irony, at the end of *Walden*, Henry Thoreau was conducting himself through his early *Journal*: circumventing death, evading women, discounting friendship, he anticipated the impossible, so as never to be seduced by the moments he loved so passionately. Our fragile volume 3 is a chapter in this perverse pilgrimage."[38]

Where some transcendentalists understood their movement to be one of resistance both to a set of rationalist concepts and to a parental generation that espoused them, Miller's Thoreau is outwardly an obedient son. Inwardly, he is all about cultivation and glorification of the self. "The true 'mythology' of the Journal," writes Miller, "is that Henry Thoreau, by the royal right of consciousness, identified himself with the Absolute, not even using Emerson's palliating circumlocution, 'Over-Soul.' So he fought for what remained of 'my life' to be partner with the Almighty. Obviously he who strives to play the drama of such arrogance on the solid soil of Massachusetts is heading as recklessly as Tamburlane or Faust toward catastrophe."[39] When Miller published his edition of Thoreau's "lost journal," all of Nelson's anger at the hyperbolic and dismissive treatment of a major writer at the hands of an influential scholar and critic, capable of making and breaking reputations, erupted. In an undated typescript fragment, Nelson describes Miller's introduction to *Consciousness in Concord* as an effort to

> amputate the conscience and principle from Thoreau and [put] up a new image of a superb but selfish, calculating and unprincipled scientist. . . . You may think that this complaint is overdone but reflect on the fact that the Morgan Library, having just discovered a new segment of Thoreau's Journals, gave it to Miller to edit . . . and that every writer on transcendentalism and the greatest period of American letters has to anticipate a drubbing from Perry Miller in some leading journal of opinion if he ventures to say these men lead lives of principle, a drubbing which often means the difference between success and failure.[40]

In the last months of 1958, Nelson began to contact several scholars and critics in an effort to counteract what he felt was Miller's outrageous misreading of Thoreau. One was Van Wyck Brooks, whose Pulitzer Prize–winning *The Flower-*

ing of New England (1936) dramatically revised upward its author's 1915 assessment of transcendentalism. Nelson had already written to Brooks regarding the "sack of Walden," Nelson's term for a proposal by the Middlesex County Board of Commissioners to expand the public bathing facilities at Walden Pond. Now he wrote to Brooks again, first on November 13, enclosing Odell Shepard's negative review of *Consciousness in Concord* from the *Emerson Society Quarterly* and exclaiming of Miller's edition, "to me it is an outright scandal but I am only one of the small wits of the infidel army and what I think does not matter much. However, I am beginning to discover that I am by no means alone in my horror and aversion to Thoreau being destroyed this way and his well springs poisoned."[41]

On Thanksgiving Day 1958 he wrote to Brooks once more, decrying "the silence, and in some cases, the modified rapture with which scholars received the scandalous introduction to Thoreau's Lost Journal." Nelson linked Miller's view of Thoreau to the indifference that Americans felt toward the possibility of nuclear war and to the sanitizing of American history. To Brooks, he quotes an article from *The Reporter,* in which Miller described Thoreau as a "warped personality, providentially mutilated, who set himself early in his single-minded career to a vindication of his ego through demonic determination to transform himself into a writer and nothing but a writer. . . . [Thoreau's was] an appalling history of egotism, a life long struggle to bend nature into the contours of his grandiose conception of himself."[42] Outraged by this interpretation, Nelson wrote,

> There is much more of this rot, all of a piece, in which he denies Thoreau all principle and humanity and says this is what 'Thoreau should signify to the tortured sensibility of today.' In short he is emasculating [and] deprinciplizing him. . . . [T]his because he cannot entirely wipe out his significance as the historians have wiped out Garrison, Parker, Alcott, Sumner, and Wendell Phillips. . . . [U]nfortunately Thoreau writes too well for oblivion, like a god, indisputably and so they have to spay him and fragment him with gaseous pseudo-explosions and defile him with Freudian witchcraft.[43]

Nelson's rage at Miller's treatment of Thoreau likely sprang in part from the lingering pain of Miller's review of *Sin of the Prophet* and from the fact that Miller, now his enemy, was also the rival and enemy of his beloved mentor Matthiessen. It may well be, also, that Nelson was enraged at the portrait of Thoreau in *Consciousness* because it was so similar to what Nelson himself disliked most in Thoreau and had the hardest time getting down in prose, namely, the psychological, inner, and often divided and ambivalent self. Nelson's efforts to convey Theodore Parker's inner life, his "sin" of self-division, largely fell flat in part because the novel was Nelson's first attempt, but even more because its author had no patience for such ambiguities in fiction or in life. "It is a current critical fad to think that life is full of ambiguities and is therefore impossible to de-

fine," Nelson said to interviewer Shaun McNiff. "I reject this because I feel that you should start and not end with ambiguity. . . . [T]here are those artists that I describe as the 'beat and shit boys' or 'the scab-pickers'—they see humanity as having scabs. They call attention to the scab wounds and pick at them and while they bleed, they feel they are having a great art experience. Some of them are fine artists—for example Tennessee Williams. But, you see, bleeding does not resolve tension—only with the grave." In response to McNiff's question about the tendency of critics to read texts as revealing writers' unconscious impulses and influences, Nelson responded, "I find this to be the malaise of the age. . . . This mucking about with the unconscious is a return to spirit witnessing and judging motives on the basis of some subconscious desire which is the opposite of my belief in historical materialism; in proof; in evidence; believing in substance; and in believing in continuity."[44]

Miller had called Thoreau's recovered journal evidence of Thoreau's "egotistical concentration."[45] For all his rage at Miller, Nelson said much the same thing in his 1966 essay "Thoreau and John Brown." There, he began by claiming that Thoreau lived as a "completely self-orbed [*sic*] transcendentalist-individualist" whose willingness to be jailed for refusing to pay a tax that would eventually go toward the Mexican War was nothing more than private resistance. He suffered from a "dark, sick . . . individualism, or isolation, or alienation," which sounds very much like the self-preoccupation that Perry Miller described. Nelson's Thoreau had been too easily self-divided: "In one vein he wants to arouse, he wants to lead, he wants to help settle the great struggle of his time, by force if necessary, and in the other he proclaims himself an avowed recluse, unable to share a common opinion with anyone."[46] Miller had, in short, fingered the very traits that Nelson discerned, disliked, and possibly feared the most: Thoreau's aesthetic sensibility, his withdrawn and even narcissistic manner. Nelson wanted to realign Thoreau and, by extension, transcendentalism toward a different polestar. For Thoreau, the change-agents were abolitionism and John Brown.

> The shy, woodsy little man who in 1855 told someone that he "suspected any enterprise in which two were engaged together," took on the sole sponsorship and, for a time, the total public defense of twelve traitors caught red-handed. . . . In his lens-clear view of John Brown, Thoreau came finally to realize that there is an exalted form of individualism which merges into universality and becomes one with it. . . . [G]reatness in any individual can only come when he rises as a symbolic peak out of a broad base below him . . . whose multiple aspirations he embodies in his own selfless, revolutionary presence.[47]

In the 1850s Emerson and Thoreau's writings became charged with political consequences, Nelson believed, because of the inescapable pressures of abolitionism and the extension of slavery. They began to act on the implications of their

writing, and likewise converted a greater range of experience into conscious thought. In particular, Nelson read Thoreau as undergoing a life-altering experience through his contact with John Brown. "On Disobedience to Civil Government" (the essay which came to be known as "Civil Disobedience"), published in 1849, is "full of revolutionary incitements," Nelson wrote. Citing Thoreau's line, "I think that it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize," Nelson asks, "What would happen if Thoreau said this today at a Vietnam teach-in?" But the energy in "Civil Disobedience" was soon dissipated by Thoreau's anarchic individualism, his Emersonian focus on self-reliance. Still, "Slavery in Massachusetts," a speech delivered in July 1854 after Anthony Burns's forced return to slavery, "shows . . . profound revolutionary growth." Here Thoreau demonstrates how social institutions reinforce injustice, and how a group of abolitionist conspirators acted against the federal Fugitive Slave Law.[48]

For Nelson, Thoreau all too quickly slipped back into his "sterile individualism," his "black despair" that arose from feeling alienated, powerless, and unnoticed. John Brown would change all that. Although Brown did not confide his true plan with Thoreau as he did with a few other New England supporters, Thoreau nonetheless converted his "dark, sick" individualism into the crusading language of "A Plea for Captain John Brown," written days after Brown's arrest at Harper's Ferry in October 1859. "There is still individualism there too, but it is no longer permeated with solipsism," Nelson argues. "It is the revolutionary individualism of man '*coming out* of evil.'" Here, near the end of his life, Thoreau was able to shed his alienation and champion "an exalted form of individualism which merges into universality and becomes one with it." True selves like Brown and, for a moment, like Thoreau, are "lifted and held on the broad shoulders of men and women . . . whose multiple aspirations he embodies in his own selfless, revolutionary presence."[49]

Perhaps most deeply, Nelson perceived that he and Miller understood transcendentalism very differently. Miller read Thoreau, and by extension other transcendentalists, as fostering rebellion by refusal, noncompliance with the religious and political conventions and compromises of their age. Society crushed their protest or else tamed it, and they turned to eccentric behaviors or slipped into conventional livelihoods. Nelson, on the other hand, stimulated by the rising nationalist movements in Asia and Africa, by the nascent civil rights movement, and by his own radical commitments, sought to recover transcendentalism's critical edge, tracing, in this case, the shift in Thoreau's transcendental individualism toward a more socially engaged and activist direction. Thoreau, Nelson reminds his readers, saw Brown as a "transcendentalist above all," acting in the world from a commitment to higher law, rather than as the hero of a liberation struggle.[50] Brown's act, Nelson wrote to Doubleday editor Kenneth

Woodward in 1955, "ended the intellectual and moral tradition of transcendentalism out of which came the Periclean Age of American [*sic*] and who was the hero of Emerson, Thoreau, Longfellow, Melville, Whitman, Alcott, Victor Hugo, Wendell Phillips, Theodore Parker."[51]

In 1960, the same year *The Surveyor* appeared, Nelson offered his most extensive interpretation of transcendentalism, prompted perhaps by his interest in Henry Thoreau and his deep engagement with John Brown. A much more generous reading of Parker than Nelson offered in *The Sin of the Prophet*, the essay "Theodore Parker as Revolutionary Moralist: From Divinity Hall to Harper's Ferry" begins with a spirited defense of transcendentalism as a revolutionary movement "against the so-called Liberal Church, against the State as interpreted by Henry David Thoreau, against the profit system as interpreted by George Ripley at Brook Farm, against imperialist war as interpreted by Theodore Parker at the time of the Mexican adventure." Transcendentalism "moved with force and violence against slavery, the United States Courts and the Constitution when it reached its apogee as the Higher Law ethic in the 1850s, and had its Gotterdammerung in the blood and doom of the assault by John Brown (a true transcendentalist, Thoreau called him) on Harper's Ferry, which, again according to Thoreau (who should know whereof he spoke), made the North 'suddenly all transcendental.'"[52]

The central contrast that Nelson develops is between Emerson and Parker. He is baffled and disappointed that Emerson refused to engage in debate with his critics after his "Divinity School Address" stirred considerable controversy. For Nelson, Emerson's refusal "seems strangely craven for a man of Emerson's proven courage and defiance, and completely at odds with those sentiments in the Divinity School Address. . . . It is hard not to accept this as a[n] obvious failure of nerve." Parker, on the other hand, ripped into his critics mercilessly. His prose, unlike Emerson's "beautiful utterances," was "an expression of deliberate coarseness, like horns in dissonance, giving a rampant masculinity to his style." His ideas, Nelson went on, "do not inveigle but fall on the ear with the demoniacal clang with which the greatest composers enslave their listeners."[53]

Parker's delight in controversy, his attacks on conventional thought and behavior, his rage against racism are most powerfully expressed in his "great sermons" of the 1850s and reveal what Nelson calls "the hard core of revolutionary transcendentalism." "There has been an unfortunate emphasis placed on the separatist-quietist phase of Transcendentalism as crystalized in Christopher Cranch's poem 'Enosis'" (actually titled "Gnosis"), Nelson went on, perhaps also thinking of his recent quarrel with Perry Miller. But this is not the only strand of transcendentalism. "There is nothing further from this self-orbed futility than the poetry which came streaming from Parker like the living waters from the rock struck by the rod of the prophet."[54]

While Nelson was most galvanized by the revolutionary potential in the transcendentalist reform tradition, many other Americans saw transcendentalism as a historical reference point and confirmation of their versions of social and individual protest. By the mid-1960s, the witness of transcendentalism had spread well beyond the scholarly world. Civil rights and antiwar advocates read Thoreau and practiced a version of his nonviolent civil disobedience; alternatively, they read Thoreau and practiced militant resistance. Adherence to a "higher law" became a standard argument for young men applying for conscientious objector status during the Vietnam War, particularly after student deferments were eliminated. "Civil Disobedience" became a manual for antiwar resistance, a way for young people simultaneously to embrace an American identity and resist American foreign policy. Thoreau's words in that essay—"if [the remedy to injustice] is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine"—find their echo in Mario Savio's words at the Berkeley Free Speech Movement's Sproul Hall sit-in on December 2, 1964: "And that—that brings me to the second mode of civil disobedience. There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart that you can't take part! You can't even passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus—and you've got to make it stop! And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it—that unless you're free the machine will be prevented from working at all!"[55]

Thoreau's refusal to pay a poll tax and his brief imprisonment felt like an anticipation and confirmation of similar acts of resistance. It was popularized in the play *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, whose first 154 productions took place at community and university theaters across the United States. In their preface, "The Now Thoreau," playwrights Jerome Lawrence and Robert Edwin Lee note the parallels between the Mexican War and the Vietnam War and write, "Time is awash in this jail cell. We are not trapped in happenings past. The explosive spirit of Thoreau leaps across the years, addressing with power and clarity the perils of his own time and, prophetically, of ours as well."[56] There were other signs of influence, as well. Buckminster Fuller, polymath architect and designer, creator of the geodesic dome and the Dymaxion three-wheeled car, explicitly linked both his inventions and his outlook to his great-aunt Margaret and to the transcendentalist movement. As Fred Turner explains, "For the Transcendentalists, as later for Fuller himself, the material world could be imagined as a series of corresponding forms, each linked to every other according to invisible but omnipresent principles." Fuller would extend this principle to the worlds of design and industry. Often appearing at public events in a three-piece suit and wearing

his Phi Beta Kappa key, Fuller "seemed to model a kind of childlike innocence that many New Communalists sought to bring into their own adulthoods."[57]

Turner's mention of "New Communalists" also reminds us that the communitarian impulse in the 1960s and early 1970s owes something to the transcendentalists' communes of Brook Farm and Fruitlands. The Ripleys' community was designed to challenge the separation of mental and physical labor that capitalism was fostering and the alienation between workers and their labor that Marx was describing. Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane sought to raise to consciousness the production chain that led from slave labor to textile mills to consumer purchases of clothing. Similarly, sixties and seventies communes sought to challenge conventional arrangements of family, labor, production, and education. In a less documentable way, transcendentalism emerged in these same decades as a model for alternative forms of personal behavior, dress, attitudes toward nature, and new forms of spirituality. Much like the nineteenth-century figures who turned to nature to experience a sense of spiritual intensity or feel a connection with the nonhuman material world, so, thought Charles Reich, members of the "new generation" "go to nature as a source. The salt water of the sea is the salt in their blood; the freedom of the sea is their freedom. The forest is where they came from, it is the place where they feel closest to themselves, it is renewal. . . . Nature is not some foreign element that requires equipment. Nature is them."[58] Although he does not mention transcendentalism, Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counterculture*, first published in 1968, grounds the changed outlook of some young Americans in the 1960s in the romantic and antinomian sensibilities that the nineteenth-century transcendentalists embraced: hostility to empiricism and emphasis on insights drawn from intuition; a preference for immediate experience, often in nature; a desire to withdraw, whether physically or attitudinally, from conventional behaviors and expectations.[59]

Those who taught American literature and culture courses in the mid-1960s and early to mid-1970s would recall the fresh "shock of recognition" that they and their students felt at reading *Walden*, with its appeal to shed reliance on conventional occupations and social expectations, or upon reading these words from Emerson's "The Transcendentalist": "These exacting children advertise us of our wants. There is no compliment, no smooth speech with them; they pay you only this one compliment, of insatiable expectation; they aspire, they severely exact."[60] Emerson's description of youthful transcendentalists seemed strikingly relevant to some students who were struggling to escape the roles that appeared to be, as in the popular movie *The Graduate*, predetermined for them. Whether they read "Self-Reliance" "correctly" or not, many students found Emerson's appeal to break with conformity both reassuringly American

in its individualism and supportive of their own efforts to challenge the norms. The attitudes that Reich described as "Consciousness III" seemed to echo the nineteenth-century movement, bringing it alive as a kind of ancestor and role model. Similarly, second-wave feminists in the women's movement of the 1970s would turn to Margaret Fuller as a role model of a woman who insisted on her own career, challenged gender stereotyping, and married for love rather than obligation, and eventually to many other transcendentalist women writers and activists as part of a neglected history of female accomplishment.

As the sixties opened, Truman Nelson had recently completed the novel that had occupied him for nearly a decade and was continuing to write reviews and essays in the midst of nearly constant financial pressure and family disarray. They had lived for years on loans and a 5,350-dollar advance given by Doubleday Publishers back in 1952 for what would become Nelson's enormous historical novel on John Brown in Kansas, *The Surveyor* (1960).[61] Even while working on *The Passion by the Brook*, Nelson had felt himself increasingly drawn to John Brown, like Theodore Parker another leader in a revolutionary moment, but one who, unlike Parker, would not fail when the chips were down. Parker's "sin" was the classic liberal failure, Nelson now thought: he was like other "men of learning and sensibility [who] are capable of understanding the physical and political facts of their own existence, yet cannot commit the irrevocable acts needed to transform them. They proclaim what is wrong, but they hesitate to move against the wrong."[62] For Nelson, Brown, the man of action, was the most compelling link between a radical American past and contemporary revolution, which Nelson was convinced belonged to Marxist revolutionaries in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Indochina. Brown could be understood through the lens of Vladimir Lenin, Georg Lukács, and W. E. B. DuBois, and equally through the perspective of the radically democratic thought of American figures like Parker, Emerson, and Thoreau. Transcendentalism came alive in the hands of John Brown, leaping off the page and into deeds. Nelson would vindicate Brown against the cultured despisers of 1950s historiography and rescue transcendentalism from its postwar reputation as the equivalent to a sterile individualism, the ineffectual battle of the alienated self against social and cosmic forces.

By the time Nelson was ready to write his novel about John Brown he had become convinced that historical events emerge not simply from the swirl of possibilities, but through actors who catalyze the moment and articulate the thoughts and desires of the masses. In "On Creating Revolutionary Art," he approvingly invokes Freud, who he has writing in *Moses and Monotheism* that "we must keep a place for the great man in the chain, or rather the network of determining causes. His nature is not as important as the qualities by virtue of which he influences his contemporaries . . . done in two ways, by his personality and the ideas for which he stands."[63]

Still, the achievement of "great men" cannot be explained by reference to their psychology, Nelson was sure. That was the route of the self-obsessed modern novel, so roundly condemned by Georg Lukács in *The Historical Novel*: "even the 'deepest' psychological analyses of the various loves and friendships of great men do not really help us to understand their works any better. On the contrary, as far as really important human relations are concerned, these are much better explained by the large objective connections than by mere biographical psychology." Lukács, the interwar Hungarian Marxist literary theorist, gave Nelson the theory by which to link leaders and masses. World-historical figures, Lukács writes, "are great because they . . . are able to answer the problems most deeply affecting the life of the people at this moment. Like the Homeric heroes physically, they are intellectually taller than the people by a head. But their historical greatness lies in the fact that they are taller *only* by a head and that they give the socially-historically possible and necessary concrete answer to the concrete questions of the people."[64]

Clearly, John Brown was just such a figure for Truman Nelson. In his interview with McNiff, Nelson observed that he was "committed to a role model who in his person actually transforms his community and who is larger than life, not in the romantic sense, but in the sense that he is the embodiment of many, many people who each have a piece of him." Asked to name such a role model, Nelson responded, "Like John Brown. He embodied the same function as the criminal who by a violent act against society takes away the guilt of those conventional medium-sized people for not doing anything about the wrongs that society is committing in the name of right. . . . In all my studies I have only found one man with a totality of consistency and that man is John Brown. Consequently, the bulk of my work has been taken up with his delineation."[65]

The Surveyor was treated respectfully but distantly by reviewers. Herbert Mitgang in the *New York Times* called it "burdensome reading," with "too many lumps of facts . . . thrown at the reader. . . . Factually, however, the novel is to be respected: it can appeal to those readers interested in the man and the period."[66] Only W. E. B. DuBois offered an unequivocally positive review, echoing Nelson's and his shared commitment to historical materialism and to a class-based understanding of human behavior. DuBois called it "a great book. . . . Nelson has used words and figures recklessly because he wanted to paint a tangled, unusual picture, futurist in impression. He is not telling a tale which develops logically, regularly, or continuously; but he is trying meticulously to fix what actually took place out there on the borders of civilization where slavery and freedom fought a bloody duel embellished and made possible by the color of men's skins and the stealing of toil."[67]

At the same time, his passionate defense of John Brown as the most authentic radical American hero continued unabated. He was enraged by J. C. Furnas's

witty, sarcastic decimation of Brown in *The Road to Harpers Ferry*, published in 1959. Equating Brown to fascist and communist agitators of the 1930s, Furnas heaps scorn on Brown's naïve and culpable Northern followers, including transcendentalists. All the more so, he says, because of Brown's evident insanity, "his disease then progressing into the egocentric exaltation that so edified millions between his capture and death. Illness, whether mental or physical, is never either ridiculous or admirable. That consideration is what saves Old Brown from being either the knave, fool, or hero that people variously said he was."[68]

For Nelson, of course, Brown was neither knave nor fool. "John Brown was supremely a man of prophesy not of appetite," he wrote in an unpublished review of Louis Ruchames's anthology of Brown-related documents, "and he felt the measure of human advance could only be proved by getting the dead weight of private greed and private lust and private property off men's backs and seeing if they could stand erect and do for themselves what they had been doing for their exploiters all their lives."[69] Yet there continued to be stunning ignorance of Brown, Nelson thought, or else dismissal of him as out of touch with reality, which was Furnas's claim. Most of all, it was the professional historians who garnered most of Nelson's scorn. "John Brown is the stone in the historians' shoe. They cannot ignore him, but they try to choke him off in defaming parentheses. . . . [T]hey revile him, perjure him and deny the significance of his personality. The outstretched arms of objective scholarship, broad enough to embrace as great American patriots, treasonable racists like Calhoun, Lee and Davis, still crack the slave whip over John Brown."[70]

Hovering behind much of Nelson's rage at historians who dismissed Brown as insignificant or insane lay his deep anger at Perry Miller, both as individual and as leading representative of the guild. Scholars, teachers, scientists, and politicians who use their supposed objectivity and status to attack the very concept or movement in which they are expert are guilty of "perrymillerism," he wrote in an undated fragment. "Perrymillerism results in the man who hates a cause the most, becoming its greatest expert and interpreter. So that Abolitionism is always interpreted by Southern apologists, Negroes by racists, Labor history by men who write admiringly of the Robber Barons. . . . [F]or this they get Pulitzer prizes and great honor. And all the while, the students, like the little child in the fairy tale, say, the King is Naked."[71]

Nelson's book on John Brown appeared both in the midst of the civil rights movement and on the eve of the centennial commemoration of the Civil War. *The Surveyor* seemed designed to call attention to the unfinished business of the war and its aftermath. Advocates of the movement had insistently raised the question of legal protections for black citizens, left unresolved a hundred years earlier. This was an issue of considerable embarrassment and annoyance to plan-

ners of centennial events, who focused heavily on historical reenactments that conveyed a sense of shared suffering and nobility, with heroes on both sides. Truman Nelson would have none of this. In a passionate address delivered at the Community Church in Boston in March 1961, Nelson called for a new abolitionist petition that would "focus the awareness of the nation on the sad and significant truth that many members of Congress have a set of loyalties indistinguishable from those who trained the enemy guns at Gettysburg on the Stars and Stripes on Cemetery Ridge." For him, the Confederate Stars and Bars, so prominently displayed during centennial events, "is today the most prominent and consistent symbol of forcible attempts to deny citizens their rights."[72]

Throughout the late 1950s and into the 1960s, Nelson became more active in the civil rights movement and eventually a white supporter of the Black Power Movement. He wrote passionate polemics about police brutality against demonstrators and exposed white racism north and south. These included *The Torture of Mothers*, an account of the so-called Fruit Riot in Harlem in 1964 and the well-documented evidence of police violence against youthful suspects held in their custody. This blistering document juxtaposes interviews with the mothers of the accused, the young men's recounting of their mistreatment at the hands of the New York police, and the fearful and hyperbolic stories about roving gangs of the "Black Mau-Mau" in the pages of the *New York Times*.[73]

The Right of Revolution, published in 1968, links the uprisings in American cities in the summer of 1967 with American precedents of armed revolutionary deeds. Revolution against institutional racism and the violence of "law enforcement" is the only recourse, Nelson argues, invoking the lineage of Nat Turner, Theodore Parker, and especially John Brown. Nelson has special scorn for the nonviolent civil disobedience approach taken by Martin Luther King Jr., Bayard Rustin, and others:

> There was a time when we had half convinced the black man that if he stood and bowed his head, or knelt and prayed for the white man to soften his hard heart, he would have his freedom. Freedom perhaps, manhood no. . . . When he [the "black man"] was finally handed the weapon of "soul force" he tried it; no one can deny that he honestly gave it a try. But we are living in a lunatic society, a racist society that will never stop hiring cops and soldiers to beat him until he stops them . . . or we stop the hiring.[74]

In the face of armed incursions into their neighborhoods, black citizens resorted to physical resistance, which Nelson called "the self-evident American right of revolution." Much of the book is an extended defense of Robert Williams, who led a group of armed black citizens in Monroe, North Carolina, engaged in running battles with Ku Klux Klan members, and was eventually forced to flee to

Cuba to evade prosecution on weapons and kidnapping charges. Nelson visited Williams in Cuba in 1963 and found him still obsessed with the violence imposed on black people in his town and region. Nelson rejoiced in the July 1967 insurrections: "I was filled with an almost Dostoevskian polarity of exultation and fear. . . . This could not be foreseen by anyone. It has the quality of a myth. It is completely unplanned, leaderless. Emerson would have understood it more than any other American, perhaps, in all its revolutionary vagueness; its formlessness. 'Massachusetts, in its heroic day,' he said, 'had no government—was an anarchy.'"[75]

On the other hand, it might be too late, Nelson feared, to bring about racial justice, and he wondered whether his own efforts had also been fruitless: "I discovered people like Theodore Parker and George Ripley and the great abolitionists and I thought if I could only write books and bring back these beautiful old truths and continuities to the people there might be another chance. It is awful to go through all this hope, all this playing with the fig leaf of words that covers our rotting nakedness."[76]

Occasionally, in his flawed introduction to Thoreau's "lost journal" and much more in his introduction to *The Transcendentalists*, Perry Miller had grasped something about the Concord coterie that Nelson ridiculed and dismissed, namely, transcendentalism as a complex and sometimes contradictory mode of *individual* experience and expression. In calling transcendentalism a "religious demonstration," Miller understood that many in the circle turned to biblical and theological vocabulary because their culture was steeped in it. But he also understood that many in the transcendentalist circle were pushing beyond Christian supernaturalism and its language, not as a dismissal of spiritual intensity, but in search of forms of expression that were fluid, personal, and experiential. This intersection of the claims of spiritual insight with thoroughly human-centered social goals is what Charles Taylor calls "secularity 3," and reveals, again, the ways in which transcendentalism may be understood as a secular movement. Still, Miller seemed unable to imagine a cultural lineage that derived from transcendentalism.

Nelson envisioned a different fate for Henry Thoreau and transcendentalism. Imagining Thoreau as a speaker at a Vietnam War teach-in, Nelson saw him issuing a call for direct action: "he leaves none of the sacred cows unscathed in 'Civil Disobedience,' giving a death wound to the democratic process itself . . . as if voting would by itself solve social dilemmas."[77] For Nelson and thousands of other civil rights and antiwar advocates in the 1960s and early 1970s, the nineteenth-century transcendentalists, abolitionists, communitarians, and contrarians became valued ancestors, a cohort of radicals whose efforts legitimated the latter-day protesters. Nelson wanted to see transcendentalism as an effort,

reverberating among succeeding generations, to build democratic culture in the young nation, an effort offering, as historian and biographer Charles Capper puts it, an "often prescient Romantic critique of utilitarian modern capitalism" in its own time and foreshadowing larger movements for cultural change.[78] On the other hand, Nelson would have been impatient with the persistence of the strand of meditative inwardness that also marked nineteenth-century transcendentalism. The counterculture's drug use and quest for spiritual highs, often through non-Western religions, would have seemed to him part of that same "sick, dark individualism" that he excoriated in Thoreau. Nor, given his strong heterosexism and masculinism, would he have found much to his liking in the gender fluidity and androgyny championed by Fuller and embraced by many in the early 1970s and onward.

Reading them now, Nelson's novels and nonfiction take us into the post–World War Two decades when transcendentalism's ideas, leaders, and texts emerged from the literary-critical world and entered into larger and more contested social and cultural spaces. Nelson's transcendentalism was confrontational, even revolutionary, and its ultimate nineteenth-century example was John Brown. Like a latter-day Brown, Nelson advocated armed resistance to racism. His defenses of black rage during the summer of 1967 would not have been out of place among the outcries that "black lives matter" following police violence in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014 and Baltimore, Maryland, in 2015. Nelson's anger at the appearance of Confederate flags among white supremacists in the early- to mid-1960s foreshadowed more recent debates about displaying the Stars and Bars.[79]

Nelson's transcendentalism was straight and male, his heroes "manly" men like Parker and Brown, his scorn reserved for aesthetes like Christopher Cranch and Charles King Newcomb, for Emerson when he refused to combat Henry Ware, and for Henry Thoreau when he withdrew, as Nelson claimed, into self-obsessed individualism. His women, like those in *The Passion by the Brook*, were largely sexualized objects. In fact, Nelson was dismissive of women's involvement in nineteenth-century reform movements, including transcendentalism. In the antislavery movement in particular, he claimed, women "really only functioned in a fund-raising, cake and fancy-work making Ladies Aid sort of way." If women did become involved, they had to become sexless in order to be effective. "Their main contribution, as I see it," he wrote, "was that they made their marriage with their apostle husbands survive and kept a warm and happy home for them."[80]

Scholarship has proven Nelson gravely mistaken in this judgment, but Nelson was not alone in this sense of women's secondary place in social change movements. His heterosexism and homophobia matched similar biases in the

civil rights and especially the antiwar movements in the 1960s, and would need to be challenged by emerging feminist and gay rights activists. Ultimately, in the last decades of the twentieth century and beginning of the next, scholars and critics would bring to attention the much richer and deeper involvement of women in the nineteenth-century transcendentalist movement—in writing, in conversation, in institutional and social reform, in challenges to conventional assumptions and behaviors. This newly revealed record would, in turn, enhance university curricula and encourage women and men to see transcendentalism as yet another resource for social change in our own time.

SEVEN } *Beston, Oliver, Dillard, and Fluid Transcendentalism*

> The leaves cry. It is not a cry of divine attention,
> Nor the smoke-drift of puffed-out heroes, nor human cry.
> It is the cry of leaves that do not transcend themselves,
>
> In the absence of fantasia, without meaning more
> Than they are in the final finding of the ear, in the thing
> Itself, until, at last, the cry concerns no one at all.
>
> —WALLACE STEVENS, "The Course of a Particular" (1951)

When we think of the effects of the transcendentalist movement in the decades since the mid-nineteenth century, perhaps the most obvious one has to do with encouraging a less alienated and more immersive relationship with the more-than-human natural world. This is not because all the individuals associated with transcendentalism wrote about or experimented with living close to natural environments, nor did they foreswear the tools of the modern age. In fact, transcendentalists depended on printing presses, newspapers, journals, bookstores, railroads, lyceums, to name just a few examples of the transatlantic urban and commercial world's communication tools, to convey their ideas and words to larger audiences. For some, "nature" was part of a philosophical argument against Cartesian instrumentalism, which separated the human actor and maker from the supposedly passive natural world, including one's own body, and against Lockean empiricism, which privileged sense impressions as the source of ideas rather than intuitive and imaginative insights. Many transcendentalists imagined, at their desks, a cosmos in which humans and nonhumans existed in reciprocal relationships, a cosmos that represented a secularized version of the kingdom of God anticipated by their more orthodox neighbors.

But for many readers and for the thousands of yearly visitors to Concord, Massachusetts, and Walden Pond, transcendentalism is inseparable from Henry Thoreau. Thoreau in turn embodies the transcendentalist turn to nature, in his essays and books, in his systematic observation and recording of seasonal change in and around Concord, and particularly in his two-year retreat on the

shore of Walden Pond. *Walden* gives readers, as well, memorable examples of Thoreau's harsh critique of the repetitive and soul-destroying labor that was changing the face of work in the antebellum North. His essays on civil disobedience, on the forced return of Anthony Burns to slavery, and on John Brown have made him a hero in civil rights, antiwar, and anticapitalist movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. At the same time, a series of writers from close to his time to ours have acknowledged Thoreau's strategic withdrawal to Walden Pond as a model and inspiration for their own strategic withdrawals to shelters apart from other humans, separated from the usual thrum of society and commerce, to enact experiments in living close to nonhuman nature and to reflect on those experiments. Among many others, we can count John Muir's *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), Henry Beston's *The Outermost House* (1928), May Sarton's *Journal of a Solitude* (1973), Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974), Anne LaBastille's *Woodswoman* (1976), and Judith Ann Smithson's *Smithson's Island: The Necessity of Solitude* (1996). This incomplete list highlights the number of women writers, in particular, who have lived alone for periods of time and wrote reflections on the experience. For them it has been especially important to embrace solitude in a culture that links women with sociability and to learn forms of outdoor self-reliance in a culture that associates such expertise with men.

What is evident in Thoreau is the same turn to secularity that marked other transcendentalists in the antebellum period: a turn away from the supernaturalism of historic Christianity, a turn toward the sense that living in and for this world was a viable option, just as a return to more traditional forms of faith was equally so for others. In this version of secularity, in which adherence to inherited religion is no longer assumed as a cultural given, this tug toward the "immanent frame," as Charles Taylor calls it, is often countered by a desire to experience the "more than" moments which push back against human flourishing as the highest good and seem to come from some other place. In this sense, the modern secular turn is toward an interpenetration, a coexistence, an overlapping of languages and behaviors, rather than the triumph of one over another or the compartmentalization of one in the face of another.

At the same time, in Thoreau's hands and those of a few others, this version of the secular takes yet another turn, a turn I call "fluid transcendentalism." Fluid transcendentalism pushes secularity even beyond the goal of human flourishing and imagines an outcome that is something like "material flourishing." If modern secularity seeks to hold in tension both "human flourishing" and "more than" experiences, this version of transcendentalist secularity locates those experiences in the vital and enchanted "glow" of *all* matter, whether biotic or nonbiotic. Thus, despite Max Weber's claim, matter has never been "disenchanted," only ignored or abused.

This chapter traces the emergence of fluid transcendentalism in Thoreau's late work and in ways of thinking and writing offered by heirs to the nineteenth-century movement. Thoreau's emergent ecological vision can be read as ecomaterialism when we link it to the contemporary work of theorists like Jane Bennett, Kate Rigby, and Serpil Oppermann. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, several writers connect their work to that of Thoreau. Our particular focus will be first on Henry Beston and Mary Oliver, whose work in several genres explores the possibilities and limitations of human language in conveying the different communicative "languages" of the biosphere. Mostly, however, we will attend to the three-decade-long writing career of Annie Dillard. Dillard's writing performs the tasks this book has set out to demonstrate: she locates herself in a tradition of transcendentalism, which she inherits, queries, challenges, and extends, and her work exemplifies the modern secular turn I identify with nineteenth-century transcendentalism and its heirs. And, like Thoreau's, Beston's, and Oliver's, Dillard's writing lights up when read under the sign of ecomaterialism.

There are moments in transcendentalist writing when the movement's collective desire to expand and deepen the possibilities for human life is challenged or set aside and another horizon opens, in which the human is a part, and only a part, of the larger biosphere. Often this "post-human" way of thinking is expressed as a literary trope, as metaphor or simile, but it does break out of the anthropocentric "dense transcendentalist" framework that most of the antebellum figures inhabited. To be open to the more-than-human world, the human needs to be decentered, or imagined to be something other than the bipedal, head-centered, conventionally gendered and male-centered self that Western culture has valorized. In *Nature*, Emerson acknowledges that intellectual culture can make more-than-human nature seem a projection of the mind, but asserts that, while understandable (because "all culture tends to imbue us with idealism"), "there is something ungrateful" in that notion. No, he asserts that he has "no hostility to nature, but a child's love to it. I expand and live in the warm day like corn and melons. . . . I do not wish to fling stones at my beautiful mother nor soil my gentle nest." After all, children, whose insights Emerson values intensely, "believe in the external world." To take in that external world, Emerson imagines himself as a "transparent eyeball," as an I that is "nothing" through which "the currents of the Universal Being circulate."[1] In a very different register, Jones Very's sonnet "The Dead" distorts and exposes the human body. Those whose "hearts the living God have ceased to know" are imagined as "dry, leafless trees," unclad in the midst of winter, who "in their nakedness find cause for mirth." These undead unbelievers are "more dead . . . / Than those that to the earth with many tears they give."[2]

Margaret Fuller's "The Great Lawsuit" shares with these men's work a glimpse of a different kind of human. But for her it is not the transparent eyeball of Emerson's mystic experience, nor Very's opposite vision of spiritually dead and nakedly branched bodies. Rather, she offers a vision of transformed and androgynous bodies in which the feminine and masculine elements are conjoined: "male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman."[3]

For the most part, transcendentalist writers employed images from nature as just that, tropes that, while often exquisitely and inventively conveyed, were meant to figure human states of consciousness. Very's sonnet is, after all, about people, not trees, and Thoreau's "I am a parcel of dried flowers" works to convey a sense of human finitude. In this they are like their romantic counterparts who made the same move, as Coleridge in "Frost at Midnight" or Shelley in "To a Skylark." Nature is still the screen against which the human psychodrama is projected.

Increasingly, however, Thoreau gropes toward a different approach to the more-than-human natural "environment" (the word itself seems to give primacy to a central human figure for whom the more-than-human is environs) and thereby a different approach to being human in it. From one perspective, *Walden* reads as an experiment in living, a project of moving some distance from conventional life in order to explore what it means to be a self on one's own terms. At the same time, the move is more than self-referring: the book traces a project of quieting the sounds of human life and learning to discern the language of other inhabitants in the natural world: "Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?"[4] Passages like that are central to Lawrence Buell's argument in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* that *Walden* "is a record and model of a western sensibility working with and through the constraints of Eurocentric, androcentric, homocentric culture to arrive at an environmentally responsive vision."[5]

Buell and others have discerned this movement in *Walden* away from an anthropocentric vision toward something more ecologically responsive. Similarly, readers and critics have turned to Thoreau's journals and his later writings, which earlier generations of critics had dismissed as unliterary, merely descriptive, and poor science. The journals, David Robinson observes, reveal Thoreau's interest in attaining both factual knowledge of nature and a deep understanding of it, the latter involving "a more passive surrender to the natural world, one based less on an intellectual mastery of it than on a sensuous merging with it." To be reawakened to the more-than-human world, a persistent Thoreauvian theme, is to grasp the "rich network of affinities that constitutes the interlacing

of human experience and the natural world."[6] Since the publication of *Faith in a Seed*, Bradley Dean's 1993 edition of Thoreau's unpublished treatise *The Dispersion of Seeds* (with other late writings), general readers and critics have paid new attention to the rhetoric and insights of these texts. Dean and Buell's pathbreaking works, together with Laura Dassow Walls's *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science*, intersected in the first decades of the current century with a rapidly altering global climate and a new sense of urgency in addressing climate change. Given both new critical attention and heightened awareness of the global crisis, it is useful to read Thoreau differently again, this time under the sign of ecomaterialism.

Consider, for example, the passage on pine cones early in *The Dispersion of Seeds*. In his introduction to the volume, Robert Richardson has already informed readers that Thoreau was intent on disproving Harvard botanist Louis Agassiz's theory, essentially based in theology, that the distribution of plants and animals was limited to the regions in which they first appeared.[7] As Thoreau announces in direct challenge, "my purpose in this chapter is to show how, according to my observation, our forest trees and other vegetables are planted by Nature." He begins with a historical reference to the Roman public pelting an unpopular leader with pinecones, but then moves quickly into a detailed description of a cone and its seeds in pairs, "each pair occupying a separate apartment behind its prickly shield." The wind, having loosed the cone from the tree, already begins to disassemble it, and so starts the process of dissemination: "Nature always adopts the simplest modes which will accomplish her ends. If she wishes one seed to fall only a little to one side from a perpendicular line, and so disseminate its kind, perhaps she merely flattens it into a thin-edged disk—with some inequality—so that it will 'scale' a little as it descends." Thoreau is amazed at the distance the wind carries the seeds, altering one kind of landscape, a pasture for instance, into another, a forest of pitch pines. Squirrels likewise carry cones and their seeds a great distance, a common enough observation, but Thoreau enjoins us (and himself) to "observe more particularly" how the squirrel shaves off the outer husk of the cone to get at the seeds.[8] He moves to observation of the white pine and the scattering of its seeds, now including by birds.

> In this haphazard manner, Nature surely creates you a forest at last, though as if it were the last thing she were thinking of. By seemingly feeble and stealthy steps—by a geologic pace—she gets over the greatest distances and accomplishes her greatest results. It is a vulgar prejudice that such forests are "spontaneously generated," but science knows that there has not been a sudden new creation in their case but a steady progress according to existing laws, that they came from seeds—that is, are the result of causes still in operation, though we may not be aware that they are operating.[9]

After many pages of observation on seeds of all sorts and their distribution, Thoreau considers the apparent irony that squirrels are the source of New England's "vast and indispensable" oak forests: "it is to them that we owe this gift" although they have failed to "reap the fruit of their labors." And what is humanity's response to this generous gift, unplanned and "a kind of accident"? We consider them as "vermin," and organize squirrel hunts which slaughter them in the thousands. "We should be more civilized as well as humane if we recognized once in a year by some symbolical ceremony the part which the squirrel plays in the economy of Nature."[10]

Walls has observed elsewhere that in *The Dispersion of Seeds* Thoreau moves from considering the "self alone in nature to a social ecology in which the ethical self does not center and command, but decenters, negotiates, constructs, and defends alliances."[11] Walls's insight helps align Thoreau's project in his journals and late writings with the work of contemporary new materialists, ecofeminists, and ecomaterialists. Suppose we set aside biblical notions of a fall from paradise, or the romantics' (and transcendentalists') longing to return to the imagined condition of childhood, or Weber's positing of a disenchanted world, or even Charles Taylor's "what if" story about Europeans' coherent worldview in 1500. What if we "call into question the diagnosis of disenchantment [by recalling] alternative stories about the nature of things," in Jane Bennett's words? What if, in short, the cosmos were not disenchanted after all, but still possessed of its own inherent energy, its own "thing-power," as she calls it?[12]

In developing her argument about "thing-power," Bennett acknowledges the affinity between what Spinoza called *conatus*, or the tendency of all things to "persist," and Thoreau's notion of "wildness." "Wildness was a not-quite-human force that addled and altered human and other bodies. It named an irreducibly strange dimension of matter, an *out-side*." Bennett's project in *Vibrant Matter* is to render more horizontal the human relation with the more-than-human world by emphasizing the vital materiality that is common to all things: "All bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations. And in a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may very well be to harm oneself."[13] Part of the problem is that the human ability to conceptualize in thought and language renders the more-than-human world an object of interest, desire, or manipulation rather than a realm of coexistent forms of being. Thoreau recognized this and sought through the increasingly reportorial language of his journals and late writings to diminish the seductive force of metaphor in favor of a more modest literary style. The deep challenge, Serpil Oppermann observes, is to recognize that all material existence is self-expressive, has a "language" of expression, and is engaged in "dynamic self-articulation."[14]

Looking back at the passage from *The Dispersion of Seeds*, we may see more clearly why Bennett pays tribute to Thoreau at the beginning of *Vibrant Matter*. Much as Thoreau disavows any notion of special creation and supernatural intervention, Bennett and the new materialists focus attention on the materiality of all existence rather than the special "soul" force of humanity or the superadded existence of the divine in the cosmos. Thoreau wishes to attend carefully and closely to the ways seeds have "thing-power" in their employment of wind and animals to carry them to new habitats. He appreciates the work of squirrels without attributing anything to their efforts besides their conatus, their desire to persist. And he diminishes the place of the human in the process by describing the foolishness of humans hunting the same squirrels who are responsible for the extension and preservation of the economically valuable stands of oak trees.

We may also read *Walden* in light of Bennett and Oppermann. True, Thoreau still relies on biblical language, fills the book with the first-person singular, and distinguishes between the "animal man" and the "intellectual" or "spiritual" man. True, his obsession with overcoming the sexual "generative energy" feels at odds with his "reverence" for the "animal" in him, and his sense that "Nature is hard to be overcome, but she must be overcome" feels dissonant with the "indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature"—unless we note, also with some discomfort, the idealist difference between "nature" and "Nature." Still, Thoreau increasingly observes the independent life of nature, as in his account of watching a hawk on April 29, 1846: "It was the most ethereal flight I had ever witnessed. It did not simply flutter like a butterfly, nor soar like the larger hawks, but it sported with proud reliance in the fields of air; mounting again and again with its strange chuckle, it repeated its free and beautiful fall, turning over and over like a kite. . . . It appeared to have no companion in the universe,—sporting there alone,—and to need none but the morning and the ether with which it played."[15] There is a hint here of ecomaterialist Kate Rigby's notion of "open-ended interactivity."[16] In the chapter "Spring," Thoreau offers this familiar passage which strikingly anticipates Bennett's sense that "disenchantment" is just one way to tell the story, that the material world may, after all, persist in being enchanted: "At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of Nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and Titanic features. . . . We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander."[17]

Thus, in *Walden* and in his late writings, Thoreau strives to reverse the romantic project, which relocates the human drama within natural settings but preserves an essential anthropocentrism. In that project, the more-than-human

world provides settings and tropes for the human psychodrama, mirrors the growing self, echoes the patterns of birth, life, and death, and offers naturalistic examples of rebirth and new life. Such borrowings from the more-than-human world are evident in much of the work of transcendentalists and other American romantics not in their circle. What is distinctive about Thoreau is his effort to diminish the human reference and refocus on the natural circumstance. At the same time he acknowledges that this effort, when expressed in language, is from the start made problematic because it is grasped through consciousness and thus ineluctably translated and interpreted through language. What I call "fluid transcendentalism" is not simply "back to nature" or "living in the wild." It is the nearly impossible but exhilarating effort to set aside the impulse to conceptualize and embrace, or, as Bennett says, following Adorno, a kind of imagining without thinking.[18] The genealogy I trace includes those who deal most directly with this conundrum, who take seriously the effort to consider the more-than-human material world as vital and agentic.

Writers who engage and extend a Thoreauvian "fluid transcendentalism" do so in sometimes strikingly different ways. Henry Beston (1888–1968) extends Thoreau's fascination with the creativity and intelligence of the more-than-human world, particularly in *The Outermost House* (1928), his account of a year's solitary life on the Atlantic side of Cape Cod, near Eastham and Orleans. True, Beston disavowed the parallels with Thoreau. To poet Winfield Townley Scott, Beston wrote, "I suppose that I do link up with Thoreau, but I do not read him and have never been under his influence. He is not a naturalist. What interests him and stirs him most deeply are the principles governing the individual life when that life is enclosed in a gregarious society."[19] Beston's judgment is eccentric, to say the least. We now recognize Thoreau's contributions as a naturalist, which was never Beston's strong suit.[20] What they do have in common are a gift for memorable prose, their shared region of origin, their shared fascination with Cape Cod, the "retreat" into semi-solitude, the effort to observe nature closely and sympathetically, and their eventual desire not to "mine" nature for images and tropes that relate to human experience.

In a long passage about shore birds, Beston inquires about the collective life of the flocks, their ability to communicate and act "in such an instancy of time." There is a form of intelligence at work here, Beston concludes, that humans denigrate at their peril: "We patronize them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate of having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein we err, and greatly err. For the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught

with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth." To be sure, Beston was visited often by Coast Guard coastal patrols and by friends in the nearby towns. He watched in horror the shipwrecks of fishing boats and merchantmen, and endured with other locals a violent nor'easter. But it was the larger community of more-than-human life that nurtured him: "Dwelling thus upon the dunes, I lived in the midst of an abundance of natural life which manifested itself every hour of the day, and from being thus surrounded, thus enclosed within a great whirl of what one may call the life force, I felt that I drew a secret and sustaining energy. . . . Life is as much a force in the universe as electricity or gravitational pull, and the presence of life sustains life."[21]

Here Beston seems closest to Thoreau's sense of nature as a vast, interconnected, and interlocking system of which humanity is a part, but only a part. Walls traces Thoreau's embrace of that view to his reading of Alexander von Humboldt: "The kind of science Humboldt advocated—exact, detailed, holistic, and interactive field studies which gathered and collated a dazzling array of data from all points of the globe—is now in retrospect identified as protoecological."[22] Similarly, while we sometimes get a sense of immaterial "life forces" at work in Beston's view of the ecosphere, his writing not only echoes and builds on Thoreau's views, but also anticipates the insights of new materialists like Bennett and Kate Rigby.

If Henry Beston was reluctant to acknowledge that Henry Thoreau had gone before him, Mary Oliver, also a Cape Cod–based writer, has been less reluctant to acknowledge her admiration of Thoreau's landlord. In "Emerson: An Introduction," Oliver writes of Emerson's refusal to "turn from the world, which was domestic, and social, and collective, and required action." At the same time, she is sure that the more enduring and influential Emerson lay in his thought and his writing, his long effort to encourage "the heart's spiritual awakening as the true work of our lives." What does "spiritual awakening" mean to Oliver? The way she puts this is difficult and somewhat obscure: "Attachment to the Ideal, without participation in the world of men and women, was the business of foxes and flowers, not of men, not of women." I take this passage to mean that the deepening of individual consciousness without engagement in the material and social world would lead only to a life of observation and classification, "of foxes and flowers."[23]

Still, it is a startling comparison for a poet whose Pulitzer Prize–winning book of poetry, *American Primitive* (1983), works to blur and transgress exactly that border between the "world of men and women" and the world of "foxes and flowers." No artist can be expected to stay in the same creative place over several decades of work, and indeed the more overtly Christian language of the poems

in *Thirst* (2006) seems a departure from the language of *House of Light* (1990) and *American Primitive*. Here I want to look at poems from those earlier collections, link them to a tradition of fluid transcendentalism, and see how they might be read in a new materialist light. My effort here is to locate Oliver in that tradition, leaving the question of her relations to contemporary feminist theory or poetics for other readers.

In a burst of scholarship in the late 1980s and early 1990s, critics wondered whether Oliver's poems, in the collections noted above and in *Dream Work* (1986), had fallen into a trap of equating women with nature, with reproduction and body, and thus extending the prison of the second sex. In vigorous response, Janet McNew proposed in "Mary Oliver and the Tradition of Romantic Nature Poetry" that Oliver's poems, in effect, stare down the old romantic conceit of male mind and female body, male consciousness and inert nature, and shame it into silence. "What Oliver does in her most intense visionary poetry is not so much to defy patriarchal boundaries as to ignore their defining powers. . . . In Oliver's 'primitive' world, physicality thus becomes the most visionary spirituality."[24]

To lose oneself is not to lose the power of language, as the existence of her poetry itself makes clear, but rather to turn down the volume of consciousness, to experience another state of being. That state of being is a deep, though also admittedly temporary, identification with other bioforms. Oliver's effort in these poems thus is twofold: to imagine oneself in another creaturely form, and to imagine a form of expression that is not verbal but is nonetheless communicative. This project finds rich expression in "The Sea":

> Stroke by
> stroke my
> body remembers that life and cries for
> the lost parts of itself—
> fins, gills
> opening like flowers into
> the flesh—my legs
> want to lock and become
> one muscle, I swear I know
> just what the blue-gray scales
> shingling
> the rest of me would
> feel like!
> paradise! Sprawled
> In that motherlap,
> in that dreamhouse

of salt and exercise,
what a spillage
of nostalgia pleads
from the very bones! how
they long to give up the long trek
inland, the brittle
beauty of understanding,
and dive,
and simply
become again a flaming body
of blind feeling
sleeking along
In the luminous roughage of the sea's body,
vanished
like victory inside that
insucking genesis, that
roaring flamboyance, that
perfect
beginning and
conclusion of our own.[25]

Here evolution, which supposedly ends in "the long trek / inland," results only in a "brittle / beauty of understanding" which the poet is willing to set aside for the "flaming body" of the fish, whose "roaring flamboyance" is sufficient "beginning and / conclusion." Although the poem gestures toward nostalgia, as if the unity with nature existed once and is now lost, the fact that the "body" (especially a female body) "remembers" another form of being suggests that nature is not so "other" after all, but is materially kin. In this poem and in others like "Happiness," "The Honey Tree," and "In Blackwater Woods," Oliver explores the physicality of her body and the materiality of nature. McNew says it well: "Oliver's visionary goal, then, involves constructing a subjectivity that does not depend on separation from a world of objects. Instead, she respectfully confers subjecthood on nature, thereby modeling a kind of identity that does not depend on opposition for definition."[26]

Oliver's poems anticipate the insights of ecomaterialists like Kate Rigby who emphasize "material spirituality," the interconnectedness of all things rather than the human (and particularly human male) assumption of dominance. Recovering traditions of indigenous peoples, Rigby says, is a path to righting the damage of a Western epistemology that "infamously sunders nature from culture and construes the nonhuman world primarily as an object of knowledge, economic exploitation, or aesthetic appreciation, but rarely as agentic, commu-

nicative, and ethically considerable."[27] We see an echo of such traditions in Oliver (as we do in Thoreau) and her interest in portraying the human self as a bear or a fish, as she does in "The Sea" and in "The Fish" and "Honey at the Table," all in *American Primitive*. In poems like these, Oliver gestures back toward the secularity of the (misnamed) transcendentalists with their focus on immanence rather than transcendence, with their sense that the world itself is sufficient, and gestures particularly toward the example of Thoreau, who imagines in *Walden* "that my head is an organ for burrowing, as some creatures use their snout and fore-paws, and with it I would mine and burrow my way through these hills."[28]

At the same time, what is striking in Oliver's poems in *Dream Work*, *Twelve Moons* (1979), and *American Primitive* is the (relative) absence of anxiety about language. Romantic and postromantic poets seem often tormented by the desire to recover a more authentic connection with the more-than-human world and by the simultaneous awareness that language itself imposes an order and structure on experience that inevitably separates the poet from that experience: "Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" Wordsworth laments. But Oliver anticipates, as Thoreau did, Serpil Oppermann's insistence that nature be understood as itself articulate, communicative, and intentional. Matter itself is endowed with stories and agency, "signs and meanings. The idea that all material life experience is implicated in creative expressions contriving a creative ontology is a reworking of ecological postmodernism's emphasis on material processes intersecting with human systems."[29] True, Oliver continually returns to human-made language after each experience as bear, whale, fish, and so, as Vicki Graham observes, cannot escape her cultural conditioning.[30] Still, what is remarkable is the continuous effort in these poems to imagine a different quality of existence and to do so without anxiety.

In "The Lilies Break Open Over the Dark Water," the poet begins with a series of metaphors ascribing human-like behavior to the pond lilies:

> Inside
> that mud-hive, that gas-sponge,
> that reeking
> leaf-yard, that rippling
>
> dream-bowl, the leeches'
> flecked and swirling
> broth of life, as rich
> as Babylon,
>
> the fists crack
> open and the wands

of the lilies
quicken, they rise

like pale poles
with their wrapped beaks of lace;
one day
they tear the surface,

the next they break open
over the dark water.
And there you are
on the shore,

fitful and thoughtful, trying
to attach them to an idea—
some news of your own life.
But the lilies

are slippery and wild—they are
devoid of meaning, they are
simply doing,
from the deepest

spurs of their being,
what they are impelled to do
every summer.
And so, dear sorrow, are you.[31]

Out of the primordial ooze, as rich as anything humanity has produced in ancient or modern cultures, the lilies emerge, "crack," "open," "quicken," "rise," "tear." But then the poet steps back to recognize, as Stevens does in "The Course of a Particular," that the more-than-human world proceeds on its own agenda and is simply "devoid of meaning" as imposed by human consciousness. Still, illustrating Vicki Graham's point, Oliver cannot stay apart from human reference or experience very long, since, after all, the poem is made of human language, but the return is muted. The reference is not to a reader but rather to a state of being, a silent, inarticulate "return" to a (human) emotional response that reappears each summer, without thought, much as do the lilies.

In the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, no writer has more consistently engaged the legacy of transcendentalism than Annie Dillard. Over the course of her writing career, from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* in 1974 to *The Maytrees* in 2007, Dillard has engaged the issues raised by the nineteenth-century figures, extending, probing, and challenging their insights

through her own distinctive imagination and vocabulary. She thinks and writes "transcendentally," but not as a nineteenth-century person; rather, as inheritor of modern and contemporary physics, biology, and geology, and as one living in the shadow of global war and daily violence. Still, the issues that shape her prose echo transcendentalist concerns: What is the role of imagination and intuition in the pursuit of truth? How do we imagine the place of the human in the material, more-than-human world? What language should we employ to convey that place? How might we imagine and enact the connections among individual humans, human community, and the more-than-human world? These questions are simultaneously theoretical, philosophical, theological, social, economic, environmental, and imaginative. We should not expect Dillard, or any artist, to offer a single or sufficient map for integrating all these claims. Rather, we may find in her work an effort to see and convey her corners of the world differently, oddly, certainly incompletely, and so illuminate that world for her readers. In particular, I call attention to the distinctively "secular" nature of Dillard's work and to the "fluid transcendentalism" of her engagement with the material world.

That Dillard's work can be understood in light of that nineteenth-century movement seems by now a critical commonplace. C. D. Albin writes of "transcendental echoes." David Lavery notes the parallels between transcendentalists' and Dillard's privileging of sight. Like her nineteenth-century forebears, Dillard writes a prose that is an assemblage of other texts, a weaving of references, a study in intertextuality. This is the point made by Marc Chenetier, who notices in *Pilgrim*, as in *Walden*, "a technique of micro-collage within sketches and narrative strands, a technique that permeates—and sometimes saturates—the text with allusions to legends, allegorical narratives, proverbs, mottos, and sayings of all kinds . . . a shared encyclopedic rage."[32] Richard Hardack, Dillard's most severe critic, links her work with what he considers the anti-body and misogynist pantheism of mid-nineteenth-century American writers, especially the male transcendentalists.[33] Dillard herself makes the transcendentalist connection explicit: in *Pilgrim*, that most bookish book, Thoreau is mentioned six times, Emerson twice; she has a goldfish named Ellery Channing and lives in a little house near water, just beyond human settlement, as is the setting for her subsequent book, *Holy the Firm*. In *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, she recalls her neighbor Noah Very, a descendant of Jones Very, "the transcendentalist poet who composed 'The Spirit Land' and other abstracting sonnets."[34] Dillard composed *Pilgrim* not on site but, rather, afterwards, in the Hollins College library, surrounded by note cards, calling to mind Thoreau's composition of *Walden* in the third-floor garret of the family home in Concord.

It is clear that Dillard has been immersed in questions we might think of as "religious" or "spiritual" from childhood. In *An American Childhood*, she recalls

her youthful anger at the gulf between her comfortably upper-middle-class Presbyterian congregation in Pittsburgh and the incendiary message of the Bible with its "wild opposition to their world." She was soaked in biblical language, which "played in my head like a record on which the needle has stuck, played at the back of my mind and moved at the root of my tongue and sounded deep in my ears without surcease." This sense that there are other worlds besides the visible and conventional one was reinforced for Annie through her discovery of Emerson, who was "my first crack at Platonism, Platonism as it had come bumping and skidding down the centuries and across the ocean to Concord, Massachusetts. Emerson was a thinker, full time. . . . I wrote a paper on Emerson's notion of soul. . . . It was metaphysics at last, poetry with import, philosophy minus the Bible. And Emerson incited to riot, flouting every authority, and requiring each native to cobble up an original relation with the universe. Since rioting seemed to be my specialty, if only by default, Emerson gave me my heart."[35] Her imaginative life was matched by a fascination with the material world, and she writes about her rock collection, the history-filled landscape around Pittsburgh, her fascination with insects and amoebas. This youthful combination of idealism and materiality leads the reader into the key elements, often observed, of *Pilgrim*: its "bookishness" (including its indebtedness to transcendentalism), its recourse to religious and biblical rhetoric and tropes, and its insistence on seeing the more-than-human world around her, on becoming transparent to the environment.

C. D. Albin writes that Dillard's debt to Emerson and Thoreau is "not so much philosophical as it is methodological and linguistic." Albin may have in mind the dualism and idealism that pervades nineteenth-century transcendentalism, and Dillard, in *Pilgrim* and elsewhere, certainly struggles with subject/object issues herself. Albin is certainly right that Dillard also retraces, in modern guise, the transcendentalists' interest in the adequacy of language to convey insight.[36] Indeed, "insight" is exactly what Dillard reaches for, starting in *Pilgrim*. That book, a "meteorological journal of the mind" (a phrase Dillard takes from Thoreau), is all about seeing. First comes the effort to shake off the preconceptions of conventional life, "to gag the commentator, to hush the noise of useless interior babble. . . . Instead you must allow the muddy river to flow unheeded in the dim channels of consciousness" and see what is really there. As Thoreau writes in *Walden*: "Suddenly an influx of light filled my house, though the evening was at hand, and the clouds of winter still overhung it, and the eaves were dripping with sleety rain."[37]

"It's all a matter of keeping my eyes open," Dillard writes early in *Pilgrim*. A teeming, living world is all around, but most humans miss it completely. What does a horse really look like? How do field mice sever blades of grass? How does

a muskrat behave in its pond after dark? This intense desire to see what is really there at times, in her work, involves a letting go. "When I see this way I am transfixed and emptied," she writes. *Pilgrim* is filled with such moments of intense revelation. In one, Dillard reads about a newly sighted girl's ecstatic description of a "tree with lights in it." And then, "one day I was walking along Tinker Creek thinking of nothing at all and I saw the tree with lights in it. I saw the backyard cedar where the mourning doves roost charged and transfigured, each cell buzzing with flame. I stood on the grass with the lights in it, grass that was wholly fire, utterly focused and utterly dreamed. It was less like seeing than like being for the first time seen, knocked breathless by a powerful glance." For Dillard, nothing will do except to keep her eyes open, try to still the blather of self-consciousness, and engage in pursuits like stalking a muskrat. He was only eight feet away from her during the forty minutes of her intense observation one night, and yet, she thinks, "he never knew I was there." But then, "I never knew I was there, either. For that forty minutes last night I was as purely sensitive and mute as a photographic plate; I received impressions, but I did not print out captions. . . . I have often noticed that even a few minutes of this self-forgetfulness is tremendously invigorating. I wonder if we do not waste most of our energy just by spending every waking minute saying hello to ourselves."[38]

But what does Dillard see in the more-than-human world? What is the texture of the geography through which she stalks or floats or, dreamlike, glides? Although she finds a natural world intense in its beauty, she is also, so she says, horror-struck by its waste and profligacy, evidence, as Steven Webb observes, of a "prodigious God who splurges and wastes rather than creates and orders."[39] The most famous passages in *Pilgrim* convey this sense of nature's grim and hazardous method: the frog punctured and drained by a giant water beetle; the polyphemus moth, its wings stuck to its back, dragging itself horribly down the school driveway; insects devouring their own eggs and their young devouring their parents. So relentless is the account in the chapter called "Fecundity" that she catches her breath and says, "Just think: in all the clean beautiful reaches of the solar system, our planet alone is a blot: our planet alone has death."[40] The outrage Dillard expresses at all this circumstantial brutality is not limited to the more-than-human world. She voices her shock at inexplicable human suffering in passages like this from *Holy the Firm*: "And you can get caught holding one end of a love, when your father drops, and your mother; when a land is lost, or a time, and your friend blotted out, gone, your brother's body spoiled, and cold, your infant dead, and you dying: you reel out love's long line alone, stripped like a live wire loosing its sparks to a cloud, like a live wire loosed in space to longing and grief everlasting."[41]

So, paradoxically, Dillard's intense desire to "get close" to nature, to still the "interior babble," leads her in *Pilgrim* to the countervailing response, the disgust,

outrage, and shock at what she perceives to be nature's waste, even nature's immorality. And that struggle to maintain human difference—that is, a human (Western) moral consciousness—is itself a linguistic problem. How does one convey intimacy with the more-than-human world in a language that presupposes reflective separation, conceptualization, and subject/object difference? This is Dillard's challenge as a writer, a challenge that begins with recognition not of nature's intimacy but of nature's otherness: "The frog that the giant water bug sucked had, presumably, a rush of pure feeling for about a second, before its brain turned to broth. I, however, have been sapped by various strong feelings about the incident almost daily for several years. Do the barnacle larvae care? Does the lacewing who eats her eggs care? If they do not care, then why am I making all this fuss? If I am a freak, then why don't I hush?"[42]

This double motion—the desire to be transparent to the material world, and a sense of human difference—reminds us of Thoreau's experiences recounted in *The Maine Woods*. As Thoreau works toward the summit of Mount Ktaadn, he encounters a very different face to the natural world than the one he had apostrophized in *Walden*. Here the environment is "vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits":

> [It] has got [the human being] at disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty. . . . I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one . . . but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries!—Think of our life in nature,—daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it,—rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense! Contact! Contact! Who* are we? *where* are we?[43]

Is language ever sufficient to convey the otherness of the more-than-human, the "out-side," as Bennett calls it? Thoreau's recourse to italics and parallel short bursts of questioning suggests the strain on language itself. Similarly, and particularly in *Pilgrim*, Dillard strains to find language to convey both the beauty and the horror of the natural world. She is perpetually bewildered, amazed, overwhelmed, stunned, and regularly engaged in hyperbolic language to convey her insights.[44]

In *Living by Fiction* (1982), Dillard pursues this question of whether and how language, especially imaginative prose, can build a bridge to the more-than-human world. The apparent subject of the book is modern and contemporary fiction, but in fact the book follows quickly on *Pilgrim* and *Holy the Firm* in inquiring about whether there is an ethic in nature that humanity might find and emulate. Her conclusion is stark: nature is not meaning-filled in the way Western humanity had once assumed: "Christianity and science, which on big issues go hand

in hand intellectually as well as historically, everywhere raised the standard of living and cut down on the fun. Everywhere Christianity and science hushed the bushes and gagged the rocks. They razed the sacred groves, killed the priests, and drained the flow of meaning right off the planet. They built schools; they taught people to measure and add, to write, and to pray to an absent God. The direction of recent history is toward desacralization, the unhinging of materials from meaning." If she finds Western Christianity part of the problem rather than a resource for a solution, then in *Living by Fiction* she turns to fiction to provide maps to meaning-filled existence. Whether fiction writers set out to be ethicists and whether their works are adequate guides for ethical lives are questions this deeply troubling and troubled book does not address. Indeed, at its end, Dillard asks whether there is in fact any connection at all between the crafted simulacra of works of fiction and the "great world" outside them. "Do art's complex and balanced relationships among all parts, its purpose, significance, and harmony, exist in nature? Is nature whole, like a completed thought? Is history purposeful? Is the universe of matter significant? I am sorry; I do not know."[45] *Living by Fiction* is, in fact, a kind of experiment in extremism. Unlike *Pilgrim*, with its intense moments of at-one-ness with the more-than-human world, or *Holy the Firm*, with its notion that there exists a kind of inherent vitality in nature, *Living by Fiction* reveals its author as bound by the project of the book, which has to do with human design and artifice, to see how far she can go in depriving the more-than-human of any inherent meaning.

Dillard wrote in the introduction to *Living by Fiction* that it "attempts to do unlicensed metaphysics in a teacup."[46] In the same year she published *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, which begins to move in a different direction, one that parallels Thoreau's late writings and may also, like those writings, be illuminated by contemporary ecomaterialism. Where consciousness and self-consciousness seem perpetually to get in the way in her earlier works—"we are moral creatures, then, in an amoral world. The universe that suckled us is a monster that does not care if we live or die. . . . We are free and seeing; we can only try to outwit it at every turn to save our skins"—in *Teaching* and later works we may discern a different tone emerging, but only gradually.[47] There is still Dillard's extravagant, wild, impressionistic language, her wit, the love of puns she inherits, it seems, from her mother. Her friend Larry in *Teaching* keeps a palm-sized rock on a shelf in the cabin where he lives alone, and is trying to teach the stone to talk. Dillard describes this as "noble work," involving sacrifice and the suppression of self-consciousness, and a task that has apparently cost Larry his marriage to his estranged wife. Dillard does not ridicule this effort, but asks whether it is fruitless to expect nature to be responsive in the way that language speakers can be. Nature does not speak: "There is nothing but those things only, those created

objects, discrete, growing or holding, or swaying, being rained on or raining, held, flooding or ebbing, standing, or spread. . . . There is a vibrancy to the silence, a suppression, as if someone were gagging the world. But you wait, you give your life's length to listening, and nothing happens. . . . The tension, or lack of it, is intolerable. The silence is not actually suppression; instead, it is all there is." Nature's otherness, its out-sideness, is a source of fascination and encounter for Dillard, who recounts trips to the Galapagos Islands and a mangrove swamp in Florida, or witnessing a total eclipse. In all this she resembles Thoreau and his late, intense, minute descriptions of nature. But she still feels a sense of alienation from nature. Humans are "sojourners" on the planet, the word suggesting "a nomadic people's sense of vagrancy, a praying people's knowledge of estrangement, a thinking people's intuition of sharp loss. . . . It is strange here, not quite warm enough, or too warm, too leafy, or inedible, or windy, or dead." What we share most deeply with the more-than-human world, in fact, is the inevitability and necessity of death.[48]

Readers familiar with Annie Dillard's "autobiographical fictions" from the 1970s and 1980s—*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, *Holy the Firm*, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*—may find her 1992 novel *The Living* a significant departure in style, themes, and perspective.[49] Set in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s in the Pacific Northwest, *The Living* portrays the lives of several generations of white and indigenous people as they experience cycles of economic boom and bust, and in that way alone Dillard departs from the solitary musings that often characterized her earlier works. Rich in social detail (though sometimes, according to historian Richard White, historically inaccurate), *The Living* is largely absent the descriptions of moments of individual mystic illumination that mark her most popular works.[50] *The Living* traces a set of families and individuals who have settled or who arrive on the western edge of the continental United States. Some of these are Euro-Americans, including the Fishburns, the Sharps, and the Honers, and some are indigenous, including Kulshan Jim and Queen of the May. Much of the action of the novel takes place in and around the settlement of Whatcom, which would eventually become part of Bellingham. The novel is filled with various subsidiary plots, including ones dealing with Whatcom's fragile economic circumstances, so dependent on distant decisions, and the white settlers' mix of reliance on and antipathy toward Chinese workers. But the central plot of the novel deals with the bizarre and disturbing figure of Beal Obenchain, a hulking giant, violent, disturbed, a reader of Emerson and Nietzsche, and his riveting interaction with Clare Fishburn, investor and local official in Whatcom.

Convinced of his intellectual and moral superiority over the mass of other settlers, Obenchain decides to choose, at random, one citizen to tell that he intends to kill him one day, only not just yet. Instead of simply ending this unfor-

tunate's life, Obenchain reasons that the sure knowledge of impending death will be a kind of living death, a perpetual bondage to the will of another. From a hat he draws the name of Clare Fishburn. Obenchain has become a "cultist of energy. Capturing the mind of Clare Fishburn was an act conceived in energy and performed in energy . . . and the experiment's success produced more energy, which boiled in his own veins."[51] Over the long course of the novel, Fishburn struggles with this threat that Beal had announced one night after dinner. Eventually, Fishburn accepts his fate and chooses to live in the face of it, which frees him from the grip of Obenchain, who then renounces his plan.

Summarized this way, *The Living* sounds like a conventional nineteenth-century Euro-American novel—a diverse cast of characters, intricately plotted, set against issues of social and economic change, a kind of William Dean Howells among the Douglas firs. None of the characters quite stays with the reader, with the exception of Obenchain, and there because of his violence and cold cruelty. What is most memorable about *The Living*, rather, lies squarely in the novel's title, which could more aptly be "The Dying." The novel is saturated with death. Kulshan Jim could "smell death everywhere he went."[52] "All deaths were accidental, or none was," Dillard writes in a narrative voice,

> for disease was just as random an accident as injury, and all die. None died prematurely, for death battened on only the living, and all of those, at any age. . . . Women took fever and died from having babies, and babies died from puniness or the harshness of the air. Men died from trafficking in superior forces, like rivers and horses, bulls, steam saws, mill gears, quarried rock, or falling trees or rolling logs. . . . Children lost their lives as other people did, as a consequence of their bodies' material fragility; hard things smashed them, like trees and the ground when horses threw them, or they fell; they drowned in water; they sickened, and earaches wormed into their brains or fever from measles burned them up or pneumonia eased them out overnight. . . . A child's death was a heartbreak—but it was no outrage, no freak, nothing not in the contract, and not really early, just soon.[53]

Accidental death is matched by premeditated death—the slow torture of a native youth, staked out by a rival tribe in the nearby woods; the drowning of a Chinese worker, whom Beal ties to a pier at low tide; Beal's own death at the hands of that worker's nephew, eaten by Dungeness crabs before drowning.

Perhaps the quality of Dillard's work that has attracted most attention recently is the conjoining of both the absence, especially in *Pilgrim*, of human community (that "human flourishing" which is so central to the mainstream of transcendentalism) and an obsession with the self's immolation. Richard Hardack writes that "in Dillard's ideal state, she could attain a transparent voice indepen-

dent of a body or a source." Or, again, "To write is to have one's body endlessly transformed: emptied, burned, and finally written on and about." Thus, according to Hardack, Dillard's writing makes "women's genuinely reproductive bodies disappear." Hardack acknowledges that to insist that Dillard root her writing more firmly in her female body may simply sound like old-fashioned sexist limitation and dismissal, but still claims that "Dillard writes as if she believed that one's voice can only come . . . at the expense of one's gendered body."[54]

In contrast to this criticism, we can see Dillard's work, and particularly *The Living*, extending the approach that is glimpsed in Thoreau and more recently in Mary Oliver. That approach, now given critical substance in ecopoetics and the new materialism, is to decenter the self, to challenge the human effort to see in nature an echo of human emotion and aspiration, to challenge Emerson's notion that "nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal, and one is print."[55] Rather, she wants to insist on nature's aloofness to human notions of morality or decency, nature's ineluctable difference. At the same time, her work, like others in this often subterranean stream of transcendentalism, stresses a new kind of identity based on shared materiality, "partly leaves and vegetable mould," as Thoreau put it.

In *The Living*, we can see both this decentering and this materialism at work. As Beal Obenchain wades through mud at low tide, he battles with pigs who are also looking for clams' airholes. He lowers himself into the mud, but a pig gets there first and runs away with the clam's long neck hanging from its muddy jaws. He is himself at low tide, his Nietzschean sense of superiority fading: "winter was already pooling at his heels. His feelings had rotated under him; the force of his life had turned on him overnight." For Obenchain, who has long since separated himself from the community, the failure to overmaster Clare Fishburn has drained meaning from his life. "If he was not, as he did not now feel himself to be, the exceptional and superior man, then he was no man. He had wasted his life, his supreme own and only life, to which he had bent the singular force of all his power and hope. Although this had happened to him before—his last belief had emptied and left him sealed with demons—this time was the most murderous, he thought, and he would not recover."[56]

Sucked down by mud, tussling with the pigs for food, Obenchain suggests the end of a distorted sense of human distinctiveness. In contrast, when he frees Fishburn from the claim on his life, Fishburn has a vision of the human as part of, rather than distinct from, vast and unending cycles of living and dying. "The earth was plowing the men under, and the horses under, and the plows. . . . No generation sees it happen, and the damp new fields grow up forgetting. . . . Clare was burrowing in light upstream. All the living were breasting into the crest of the present together. All men and women and children spread in a long

line, holding aloft a ribbon or banner; they ran up a field as wide as earth, opening time like a path in the grass, and he was borne along with them."[57]

Readers who limit their attention to Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* often come away from their encounter with it feeling the absence of human others, concluding that in the lack of human community (and given the absence of autobiographical details) she is indeed like her austere nineteenth-century mentor. But *Pilgrim*, like Thoreau's *Walden*, is just one work among many, although certainly the best known. Interactions with other humans appear regularly in Dillard's subsequent books *Holy the Firm*, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, *The Writing Life*, *Encounters with Chinese Writers*, and obviously in *An American Childhood*. Still, as we approach Dillard's most recent works, we may sense a different tone. The hyperbolic language of her earlier books, particularly as she struggles to convey her solitary visionary experiences in nature, has now diminished, as has her anguish that language itself cuts one off from experience with the more-than-human world. In *The Living*, what persists is not the individual account but the overall gestalt, the sequence of life and death, the persistence of nature and natural forces. Even the protagonist Clare Fishburn is not a particularly insightful person, except at the moment of his release from mental bondage to Obenchain, when he comes to realize that his death has merely been postponed, not canceled.

In Dillard's most recent work, *The Maytrees* (2007), the sense of nature's "outside," nature's necessary otherness and aloofness, modulates even more, as it does in the late Thoreau, to a more sober, quieter, even more austere sense of humanity's material kinship with nature. With Thoreau, Dillard no longer revels in an intimacy with nature, which most often in a romantic tradition means making nature speak in a human voice. Nor does she confront her readers with the implacable indifference and frequent violence of that more-than-human. Rather, in an elegiac register, she explores places of continuity with and difference from the more-than human world.

Like Henry Beston's *The Outermost House* and many of Mary Oliver's poems, Dillard's novel is set on Cape Cod, at the boundary between ocean and land, human and more-than-human, in a thinly populated postwar Provincetown. The novel's spare plot turns on the end of what had been a fulfilling marriage between Toby Maytree and his wife Lou Bigelow. Why Maytree (as he is always called) decides to leave his wife and son is largely a mystery. Perhaps it was because Lou had sympathized with the driver who hit and injured their son Pete, but Maytree's motivation is opaque. Maytree moves to Maine with Deary Hightoe, a beach-loving artist and MIT-trained architect, and prospers in building houses for wealthy second-home owners. Twenty years later, Deary weakens from heart failure and Maytree, injured in his own mishap, is unable to care for her. They return to the dunes of Provincetown and ask Lou to care for Deary.

Maytree stays with Lou after Deary dies, and they resume their life together until first Maytree's and then Lou's death.

Compared to *The Living*, with its sweep of northwest forests, tides, the omnipresence of death, the relentless succession of generations, *The Maytrees* is a kind of miniature: just a few people, clinging to the edge of the continent. But this second novel shares with the earlier one a sense of location in the midst of an immense nature. As Maytree walks the dunes, "the silence of permanence lay on the scene. He found a Cambrian calm as if the world had not yet come; he found a posthumous hush as if humans had gone." The quiet, intimate gestures of the novel—Lou's love for Maytree, her willingness to care for him and his second wife, her humor and wit, so reminiscent of the portraits of Dillard's mother in *An American Childhood*—all these take on a poignancy when framed against the "stillness as of empty space." At the end of his life, Maytree lies outside and observes the vastness of the galaxy. The stars "were Arabic: Enif, Markab, Achernar, Hamal, Alfirk, Scheat, Rasalhague. They moved evenly over the black desert. They spread and kept their places as searchers sweep a field. Algenib and Denebola had gone before. Fomalhaut kept alone. Alpheratz and Saiph trailed out of sight."[58]

Perhaps more than any other writer in the decades around the turn of the twenty-first century, Annie Dillard has grappled with the insights and problematics of American transcendentalism. Like the members of the nineteenth-century movement, Dillard has taken the secular turn in the way I describe it: a religious—in her case, Christian (first Protestant and, since 1988, Roman Catholic)—vocabulary and worldview coexist with and interpenetrate other discourses drawn from other traditions, leading to that particular sense of disruption and uncertainty that many readers note in her work. In *Pilgrim*, language reminiscent of Christian mysticism and the contemplative tradition jockeys with excerpts from physicists and evolutionary biologists. In *Holy the Firm*, the God worshipped in Sunday's mass coexists with a little god (small *g*) whom the cat drags in and who rides on Dillard's shoulder. In her 1999 collection, *For the Time Being*, God-talk is everywhere, but when it arises Dillard is just as likely to push back against it as she is to embrace it: "Many times in Christian churches I have heard the pastor say to God, 'All your actions show your wisdom and love.' Each time, I reach in vain for the courage to rise and shout, 'That's a lie!'—just to put things on a solid footing."[59]

What is the value of individual lives, so delicately recounted in *The Maytrees*, in a cosmos where "our generations rise and break like foam on shores"? "Yet death, at least in the West, apparently astonishes and blindsides every man-bubble of us, every time."[60] Does the material world radiate with its own vitality? And does this engage her curiosity, as it did to Thoreau, or a sense of kinship,

as it did to Beston and Oliver and to new materialists and ecofeminists? That is, following my scheme, might we understand Dillard truly as a "fluid transcendentalist"? Is the more-than-human world enchanted after all? As she asks and replies in *Living by Fiction*, "Is the universe of matter significant? I am sorry; I do not know."[61]

Epilogue

In 1999, historian and biographer Charles Capper offered a survey of the historiography of transcendentalism and a thoughtful set of suggestions for scholars and students of the movement. Capper's essay is marked by the claim that transcendentalism, "once a mainstay of surveys of American thought, has virtually vanished from the historical radar screen" and "entered into a long eclipse." A series of historians and literary critics once saw in the nineteenth-century movement a kind of refinement and condensation of "American" values and traits, which "Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in the decade of the movement's rise in the 1830s (and completely ignorant of its existence), first virtually identified with 'America' itself: liberal religion, individualist democracy, and national identity."[1]

Each of those traits was systematically interrogated and disassembled in the last decades of the 1900s and beginning of the new century. From the 1940s to the late 1960s, American Studies and other American literature and culture scholars had identified transcendentalism as a prime example of how cultural criticism worked in the antebellum nineteenth century, exploring the way writers and reformers used culture's rhetoric to criticize society's shortcomings. By the mid-1960s American literary scholarship seemed, if anything, overinvested in transcendentalism's writers and the other American Renaissance–era writers. That same American Studies movement, or rather its younger members, rose up in the early 1970s against a "Concord Complex" in scholarship and succeeded, by the last decades of the century, in reorienting American culture studies toward more hemispheric, transoceanic, and global perspectives and texts.

In the hands of the New Americanist critics, a literary and social movement that was once seen as offering a prime example of cultural criticism now appeared as a perfect illustration of how such criticism, throughout its various literary and social forms, was itself a repetition of the values and behaviors it sought to critique. Sacvan Bercovitch, for example, writing of authors who were either in the transcendentalist movement or engaged with its premises, proposed "that the country's major writers were not subversive at all, or that they were radical in a representative way that *reaffirmed* the culture, rather than undermining it."[2] John Carlos Rowe called "Emersonian transcendentalism" to task

for having "an important ideological function to serve in nineteenth-century America: the legitimation of those practices of intellectual abstraction required to rationalize the contradictions of the new industrial economy."[3] For Richard Hardack, "transcendental" and "transcendentalism" function most often as modifiers, as in "transcendental pantheism," or as a noun begging an adjective, as in "Emersonian transcendentalism." In Hardack's reading of Emerson and Melville, nineteenth-century male writers projected onto nature and onto the humans most associated with nature—Africans and African Americans, Native Americans, women—libidinous and creative forces which were at odds with the emerging hypermasculine "American" identity.[4] Peter Carafiol saw transcendentalism less as a historical event with impact on successive figures as an invention of literary historians bent on locating and defining a distinctive American literature.[5] Except for Carafiol's more extensive attack on transcendentalism as a (largely invented) movement, most of these critics were content to focus their critiques on individual writers and let the label "transcendentalist" spill over onto others in the vicinity. Despite the fact that transcendentalist texts still appear in university teaching canons, they are often subject to much more gimlet-eyed scrutiny than in the immediate postwar decades. Emerson's essays and Thoreau's *Walden*, for example, now are likely to appear as regional, historically specific texts, jostling for place with any number of others.

These critical, sometimes hostile, decenterings of transcendentalism have not been limited to academia. Indeed, *New Yorker* staff writer Kathryn Schulz repeated and elaborated many of the standard charges against Thoreau in an essay called "Pond Scum." "Any serious reading of 'Walden,'" she writes, will reveal a Thoreau totally unlike the "national conscience" of popular reputation, a Thoreau who was in fact "narcissistic, fanatical about self-control, adamant that he required nothing beyond himself to understand and thrive in the world." For Schulz, Thoreau is less the ancestor of movements for racial and economic justice than the forebear of libertarians, survivalists, and the Tea Party: "the mature position, and the one at the heart of the American democracy, seeks a balance between the individual and the society. Thoreau lived out that complicated balance; the pity is that he forsook it, together with all fellow-feeling, in 'Walden.' And yet we made a classic of the book, and a moral paragon of its author—a man whose deepest desire and signature act was to turn his back on the rest of us."[6] Schulz's caustic and ahistorical critique, however enlivened by her references to contemporary political and social opinions, is a close restatement of "Henry David Thoreau: His Character and Opinions," Robert Louis Stevenson's essay from 1880. Stevenson took Thoreau to task for the same lack of social feeling: "It seemed to him, I think, that society is precisely the reverse of friendship, in that it takes place on a lower level than the characters of any of the parties would

warrant us to expect. . . . Thoreau wanted geniality. . . . I suspect he loved books and nature as well and near as warmly as he loved his fellow-creatures,—a melancholy, lean degeneration of the human character."[7]

If scholarship and criticism of nineteenth-century transcendentalism have become more measured and less celebratory, there has at the same time been no lessening of its output. Scholars have explored new archives, traced new lines of influence, and read old works with new critical and theoretical tools. In particular, we have benefited from new biographies of the movement's figures, forerunners, and families, including treatments of Emerson, Thoreau, Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody and the Peabody sisters, Mary Moody Emerson, and Theodore Parker, among many. Political, social, and environmental challenges inspire new interpretations of transcendentalist texts and institutions and require that academics learn new languages, disciplinary and otherwise. New studies have placed the transcendentalists in transatlantic and intercultural contexts, in conversation with other nineteenth-century artists, writers, and thinkers in Europe, and in dialogue with thinkers in China and Japan.

Meanwhile, transcendentalism has endured, indeed has flourished, as part of popular culture. Since the years of the Concord School of Philosophy, when visitors began coming to Concord not only for its Revolutionary history but for its transcendentalist heritage, crowds have visited that town and related sites in Salem and Boston to tour the homes, studios, shops, grounds, and cemeteries of its nineteenth-century figures. This is often a challenging task: to catch a glimpse of that world, twenty-first-century visitors have to see through the ice cream shops, tired fellow tourists, school buses, and the "bright colors of the stores and cars of modern-day Concord," as Susan Cheever says of one such often-visited location.[8] One way to recover the movement has been to link earlier figures with contemporary popular or newsworthy concerns. So, for Cheever, Concord becomes an "American Bloomsbury," where transcendentalists decorously but passionately pursue erotic connections, often impelled by "Margaret Fuller, the Sexy Muse," as one of the chapters is titled. Harriet Reisen's *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman behind "Little Women"* stresses Alcott's early gothic romances, her love of theater and fashion, her intense desire to write her way out of poverty, her impatience at the popularity of her works for young readers, and her use of alcohol and other drugs.[9] Modern readers might find contemporary resonance in Reisen's speculations about Alcott's bipolar mood swings and her sexual identity. In fiction, the transcendentalist circle hovers over Jane Langton's Homer Kelly series, including *The Transcendental Murder* (1964) and *God in Concord* (1992). Langton also wrote other stories infused with nineteenth-century literary (*Emily Dickinson is Dead*, 1984) and artistic (*Murder at the Gardner*, 1988) references. In *March* (2005), Geraldine Brooks imagines episodes from Bronson Al-

cott's early life as a peddler in the South and fills in the missing years "Father" spent away from *Little Women*'s March family during the Civil War.

Yet other audiences visit these spots or read about the movement because they have a deep professional interest in American literature and culture or a concern about the preservation of its sites. Such visitors have included generations of middle- and high-school teachers, often sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, whose lessons and assignments have been deepened by encounters with historic sites and conversations with scholars and curators. Thousands of others became interested in the fate of Walden Pond through the activism of musician Don Henley, who, in 1990, founded the Walden Woods Project, which seeks to protect land around Walden Pond by raising public awareness of encroaching development and by buying up tracts of land. Encompassing the Thoreau Institute with its extensive library of more than sixty thousand Thoreau-related items, summer seminars for teachers, and environmental experiences for school-age children, the Walden Woods Project has also featured a high-powered supervisory board of people from the New York media world, advertising, public relations, corporations, and Hollywood, initially causing some Concordians to fear that transcendentally inspired localism was at risk.

All of these versions and recoveries of transcendentalism are worth more reflection. This study has moved in a different direction. It has not been primarily a review of scholarship or scholarly trends, except where needed, nor a study of transcendentalism in popular culture. Rather, I have tried to show how the influence of transcendentalism has permeated American culture in a variety of fields and continues to be a touchstone and reference for artists, writers, thinkers, and activists. And while I "read" a variety of cultural products as a literary critic does, with attention to language, sources, influences, and resonances, for me transcendentalism and its aftermath cannot be understood only as a literary or a religious or a social reform movement to be studied by academics. Rather, it escapes its nineteenth-century boundaries and continues to be a reference point and inspiration for individuals and movements beyond the academic and culture industries. Whether we think of the movement as an expression of naïve "American" individualism or not, many transcendentalists did translate self-culture and self-reliance into a willingness to act against powerful social and political conventions and institutions. Here the obvious nineteenth-century examples are also the most compelling: Fuller's conversations, Temple School, Brook Farm, Higginson's and Alcott's efforts to free Anthony Burns, transcendentalists' eventual embrace of abolitionism and their vigorous support of John Brown, Thoreau's civil disobedience and his critiques of market and industrial capitalism in *Walden*, Louisa May Alcott's transcendentally inspired career as novelist.

A century after their time, the figures most alive in the popular imagination became resources for new generations of protest. In 1967, Roosevelt University professor Robert C. Cosbey spoke to graduating seniors on the theme of "Thoreau and This Rat Race: A Message on Being Alive." Thoreau, Cosbey observes, addresses the modern dilemma of alienation, the growing phenomenon of meaningless and repetitive labor, and the lure of consumerism. "The drama of 'Walden' is the drama of his discovery of the number of things he could afford to leave alone. The tone of 'Walden' is a tremendous delight—a shout of triumph at the discovery of how rich he was in time and energy to spend on what he wanted to do, not on what the rat race necessitated."[10] This same sense that material prosperity had hollowed out "meaning" in life likewise surfaced in the "Port Huron Statement," the founding document of Students for a Democratic Society. In challenging the "glaze" of contentment and conformity that its authors felt had descended on American society and its universities, they proposed a "search for truly democratic alternatives to the present, and a commitment to social experimentation . . . an effort rooted in the ancient, still unfulfilled conception of man attaining determining influence over his circumstances of life."[11]

As I observed in chapter six, Thoreau's writings and his sometime activism became part of the "words and music" of civil rights and antiwar protest in the 1960s. Forty years later, in the midst of the Iraq War and the continuing American cultural divide between Enlightenment secularism and Christian evangelicalism, Curtis White invoked transcendentalist writers and perspectives. In despair over the ways both secularism and evangelicalism are in thrall to corporate capitalism, White championed a "counter-Enlightenment" that encompassed William Blake, the transcendentalists, Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, Charles Olson, Allen Ginsberg, and "so many fractured movements of the recent past and present: the '60s counterculture, the environmental movement, and New Age spiritualism, in particular."[12] Celebrating imagination as counterweight to "Reason and Revelation," White channels both Blake and transcendentalists in asking, again, what it means to be human. He also gestures toward Simone Weil—"perhaps the strangest and most unlikely Thoreauvian solitary, outcast, and transcendentalist of all"—who writes that "the authentic and pure values—truth, beauty, and goodness—in the activity of a human being are the result of one and the same act, a certain application of the full attention to the object. . . . Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer."[13] We may find White's appeal to a Blakean and transcendentalist legacy of "unmixed attention" appealing, but also guilt-inducing in a culture dominated by social media and easily distracted—I, for example, checked my messages twice during the writing of this paragraph—but it is noteworthy that he brings forward those figures and their texts as commentary on our age.

In a different direction, many scholars, notably Catherine Albanese and Leigh Eric Schmidt, have traced the influence of nineteenth-century transcendentalism on forms of spiritual expression in the United States outside the Christian mainstream, what Schmidt calls "seeker spirituality—excitedly eclectic, mystically yearning, perennially cosmopolitan."[14] Those terms might equally apply to the "secular mysticism" encouraged at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. Jeffrey J. Kripal traced the origins and unfoldings of the Institute in *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (2007). In an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Kripal makes explicit the links he sees between nineteenth-century transcendentalism and the principles of nonhierarchical spirituality practiced at Esalen. Against historical religions' insistence on "monarchical notions of hierarchical authority and patriarchal power," Kripal thinks that Esalen embodies "an Emersonian spirituality, a vision of the infinite Over-Soul that is radically democratic, rooted in a much beloved nature, and profoundly committed to new revelations in the here and now."[15]

But all those engagements with a transcendentalist "tradition" require other volumes and other commentators. Here my concern has been principally with a handful of texts, broadly construed, and the ways those texts and their makers engage transcendentalist secularity. Charles Taylor has described that experience of secularity as living in the Jamesian "open space," a cultural space where truth-claims jostle for recognition and appeals to democratic forms of "human flourishing" coexist with individual "limit experiences" that challenge conventional notions of the good life. This tension, I argue, is what constitutes transcendentalism in the nineteenth century and is basic to its continuing influence in successive eras. Transcendentalism is not a "thing," not so much a coherent movement or tradition as a set of people, texts, episodes, and memories that come bracingly alive in distinctive, quirky, and sometimes disputatious ways in the intervening decades. Ives, Cornell, Nelson, Beston, Oliver, and Dillard are part of a collective effort, a transcendentalist *workshop* where the ongoing project of secularity is never completed, but always handed on to new, and often unexpected, laborers.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 30.

2. Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau*, 117–18.

3. Dall, *Margaret and Her Friends*, 86.

4. Henry James, *The Bostonians*, 1:27.

5. "In this Transcendental tendency, we see the evidence that it [Protestantism] has run or very nearly run its natural course, and in Transcendentalism reaches its termination, exhausts itself, and can go no farther; for there is no farther. Beyond Transcendentalism, in the same direction, there is no place. Transcendentalism is the last stage this side of *nowhere*; and when reached, we must hold up, or fly off into boundless vacuity." Brownson, "Protestantism Ends in Transcendentalism," 6:134.

6. Mott and Robinson, "Transcendentalism," 224.

7. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 302.

8. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 91.

9. Loving, *Walt Whitman*, 185–88.

10. LeMenager, *Living Oil*, 12. LeMenager's book is itself a remarkable example of such productive "entanglements," weaving strands of biochemistry, geology, literary theory, sociology, and cultural criticism into an account of the intense reliance of contemporary American culture in all its forms on "living oil." I also acknowledge and salute the pioneering interdisciplinary work of David Michael Hertz in his *Angels of Reality: Emersonian Unfoldings in Wright, Stevens, and Ives*.

11. See Ronda, *Reading the Old Man: John Brown in American Culture*.

Chapter 1. Transcendentalism and the Secular Turn

1. Perry Miller, "Introduction," *Transcendentalists*, 8.

2. In his blog "The Immanent Frame," Jose Casanova offers useful definitions of "secular," "secularization," and "secularism," with the caution that distinguishing among the terms is intended to clarify different phenomena "without any attempt to reify them as separate realities." Casanova, "Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms." For an astute analysis of the foundational secularism of contemporary literary studies, see Kaufmann, "The Religious, the Secular," as well as the response by Fessenden, "'The Secular.'" For a different take on secularism that more strictly limits its impact to the political realm, see Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 3–57.

3. Alternatively, we could see transcendentalism as moving toward a different definition of "religious," in line with the way Leo Damrosch has recently described the religious

sensibility of William Blake as one that "addresses the fundamental dilemmas of human existence—our place in the universe, our dread of mortality, our yearning for some ultimate source of meaning." Damrosch, *Eternity's Sunrise*, 2.

4. Alcott, "Doctrine and Discipline," 170.

5. Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*; Pfau, *Minding the Modern*; Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

6. Older but still useful surveys include Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People*, and Hudson, *Religion in America*. More recent overviews include Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, and Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*.

7. May, *The Enlightenment in America*.

8. Diderot to Sophie Volland, in *Diderot's Letters*, 189.

9. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 1:396.

10. See Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 1:403.

11. Hurth, *Between Faith and Unbelief*, 53. Gospel "harmonies" were efforts to take the biblical accounts of the life of Jesus and make a single narrative out of them. These works were especially popular among Protestant readers, whether evangelical, orthodox Calvinist, or liberal, all of whom stressed the historicity of the first four books of the New Testament. One such text available to English-language readers was Samuel Clark, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old Testament and the New with Annotations and Parallel Scriptures: To Which is Annex'd the Harmony of the Gospels* (1690).

12. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, "Third Essay: What Do Ascetic Ideals Mean?" sec. 27, 143.

13. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 181.

14. Harris, *The End of Faith*; Dawkins, *The God Delusion*; Hitchens, *God Is not Great*.

15. Bruce, *God Is Dead*, 3.

16. Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism*, 5–6.

17. Casanova, *Public Religions*, 28.

18. This is the perspective offered by Thomas Luckmann in *The Invisible Religion*.

19. In his introduction to *The Secular Revolution*, Christian Smith argues that the claim that secularism evolved out of religion and is inextricable from it is too strongly emphasized in scholarship on the secular. In contrast, he and the contributors to his edited volume stress the social circumstances of power struggles between those who represent the institutions and beliefs of religion and their opponents in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States.

20. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 1.

21. Blumenberg, *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 65; Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism*, 61.

22. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 121.

23. Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 369.

24. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 41.

25. Ibid., 87.

26. Ibid., 247, 291, 299–300, 314–317. Here and elsewhere I use descriptors like "more than" or "limit" to indicate experiences that seem to go beyond ordinary and predictable circumstances and open the individual to another level of insight. No longer connected

to specific religious traditions nor experienced primarily in institutional settings, such experiences were available in nature, in individual reverie, in conversation, and in listening to music or observing artworks, and became for late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century romantics the secular equivalents of Christianity's mystic traditions.

27. Several of the most influential responses were delivered at a 2008 Yale conference on Taylor's book and appear in Warner, VanAntwerpen, and Calhoun, *Varieties of Secularism*.

28. Smith, "Introduction," *Secular Revolution*, 18.

29. Martin, *General Theory of Secularization*, 84.

30. See, for example, Robinson, *Apostle of Culture*.

31. Ralph Waldo Emerson to Edward Bliss Emerson, 31 May 1834, in Emerson, *Letters*, 1:412.

32. Peabody, "Spirit of the Hebrew Scriptures," parts 1–3.

33. Elizabeth Peabody to Orestes Brownson, ca. 1840, in Peabody, *Letters*, 248.

34. Ripley, "Martineau's *Rationale*," 131.

35. Norton, "Ripley's Martineau," 159.

36. Ripley, Response to Andrews Norton, 163.

37. Bowen, "Locke and Transcendentalists," 174, 177.

38. Emerson, "Divinity School Address," 81, 83.

39. Brownson, "Emerson's Address," 199.

40. Norton, "Discourse on the Latest Form," 210–12.

41. Alexander, Dod, and Hodge, "Transcendentalism of the Germans," 235.

42. Quoted in Blackwell, "Theological Dead-Lock," 343. Emphasis in original.

43. Parker, "Discourse of the Transient," 352, 358.

44. Packer, *The Transcendentalists*, 93.

45. See Hutchison, *Transcendentalist Ministers*, 59–61, 77, 118–21.

46. Brownson, "Transcendentalism: Article 1," 6:1, 8–9.

47. Brownson, "Protestantism Ends in Transcendentalism," 6:134. Emphasis in original.

48. Mary Moody Emerson to R. W. Emerson, *Selected Letters*, 264. Emphasis in original.

49. Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," 115.

50. On the revival of interest in pragmatism, especially as it applies to literary and cultural analysis, see Bauerlein, *The Pragmatic Mind*; Dickstein, *The Revival of Pragmatism*; Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism*; J. Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism*; R. Richardson, *William James*; West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*.

51. James, "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," 574.

52. Menand, *Metaphysical Club*, 375

53. Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today*, 59.

54. I am indebted to Paul Janz's essay, "Transcendence, 'Spin,' and the Jamesian Open Space," for pointing out the differences between Taylor's treatment of this "open space" in *Varieties of Religion Today* and in *A Secular Age*.

55. Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 383.

56. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2–3, 11.

Chapter 2. Transcendentalism in the Postwar Years

1. Norton, "New School," 195.
2. Samuel Johnson, "Bond or Free," 1:58.
3. Samuel Johnson, "Adequacy of Natural Religion," 1:233. Emphasis in original.
4. Samuel Johnson, "Fallacies of Supernaturalism," 1:160.
5. Samuel Johnson, "James Freeman Clarke," 1:220–21.
6. Samuel Johnson, "Adequacy of Natural Religion," 1:233.
7. Henry James Sr., "Old and New Religion," 1:100.
8. Henry James Sr., "The Radical Dogmatics," 2:86, 87.
9. American Unitarian Association, *The Year-Book of the Unitarian Congregational Churches for 1892*, 46.
10. Marvin, "Independence!," 188.
11. Frothingham, *Recollections and Impressions*, 116, 119.
12. Quoted in Cooke, "Free Religious Association," in Cameron, ed., *Concord Harvest*, 1:347.
13. Persons, *Free Religion*, 46. See also Conkin, *American Originals*, 86–90.
14. Frothingham, *Recollections and Impressions*, 121.
15. Longfellow, "Some Radical Doctrines," 2:514.
16. Stearns, "Religion and Reason," 4:191.
17. Abbot, "Notes," 6:346–47.
18. David Wasson, quoted in Persons, *Free Religion*, 47–48. For a succinct summary of these arguments in the Free Religious Association, see Robinson, "Free Religious Association."
19. Longfellow, "Unity and Universality," 3:456.
20. See Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*.
21. Persons, *Free Religion*, 53.
22. Ibid., 49–51.
23. Morse, "In the Way," 2:622.
24. Robinson, "'New Epoch of Belief,'" 575.
25. Cooke, "Free Religious Association," in Cameron, ed., *Concord Harvest*, 1:349–50.
26. Ibid., 348.
27. Sargent, ed., *Sketches and Reminiscences*, ix.
28. Ibid., 75, 76. Emphasis in original.
29. Ibid., 76–79, 81.
30. Howe, *Reminiscences*, 282, 286.
31. Peabody, "Note upon a Conversation," 6:316.
32. Cooke, "Free Religious Association," 1:351.
33. Sargent, ed., *Sketches and Reminiscences*, 250.
34. See Dall, *Margaret and Her Friends*.
35. Sargent, ed., *Sketches and Reminiscences*, 384.
36. Frothingham, *Recollections and Impressions*, 127–28.
37. Frothingham, "New Birth of Jesus," 2:326, 327.

38. Bartlett, *Concord*, 155–56, 159. Both Harris (Sanborn and Harris, *A. Bronson Alcott*, 2:507–8) and Sanborn (*Recollections of Seventy Years*, 2:454–55), quote from an 1840 letter from Emerson to Margaret Fuller in which Emerson sketches out a lecture series for young men to be delivered by George Ripley, Frederic Hedge, Theodore Parker, Alcott, and himself during the winter months in "some country town" and invites her to join them. In light of the last sentence, though—"We shall sleep no more, and we shall concert better houses, economies, and social modes than any we have seen"—together with Emerson's refusal to participate in the Brook Farm community, this letter seems more a lighthearted effort to imagine a utopian university than a serious invitation to shape a new institution.

39. Alcott, *Journals*, 1:268 (13 April 1853).

40. Hickok, "Political and Literary Careers," 102, 114.

41. The sources on transcendentalism and education are considerable. See, for example, Bickman, *Minding American Education*, 38–74; Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement*; and recent biographies of Alcott (Dahlstrand, *Amos Bronson Alcott*), Fuller (Capper, *Margaret Fuller*), and Peabody (Marshall, *Peabody Sisters*; Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*).

42. Bartlett, *Concord*, 159.

43. Sanborn to Harris, 12 January 1879, quoted in Hickok, "Political and Literary Careers," 116.

44. "Concord School of Philosophy Summer 1879 Prospectus," Concord School of Philosophy Scrapbooks, 1879–1887, Concord Free Public Library (hereafter, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL). I am grateful to Special Collections at Concord Free Public Library and its curator, Leslie Perrin Wilson, for access to the Harris Papers. According to Wilson, Harris kept clippings for the years 1879–82 and 1884–87, and within those limits his collection is considered more complete than any other. Harris did not, however, keep all journalistic accounts of the Concord School, only those he thought were accurate.

45. "Philosophers in Concord," *Springfield Republican*, 2 August 1879, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

46. "The Science of Things," *Boston Herald*, 3 August 1879, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

47. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 18 August 1879, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

48. Morrison, *Chautauqua*, 3–73; Rieser, *Chautauqua Movement*, 86–127.

49. Calista Halsey, from the *Cincinnati Commercial*, reported in *Boston Commonwealth*, n.d. (probably August 1879), Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

50. Wilson, "Concord, Mass.," 1473–74.

51. "Philosophers in Concord," *Springfield Republican*, 2 August 1879, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

52. William Dean Howells, "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 3 October 1879, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

53. For a fuller account of Blake's handling of Thoreau's manuscripts, see chapter 6, note 37.

54. *Boston Herald*, 13 July 1880, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 13 July 1880, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL; "The Athenian Academy," *New York Times*, 14 July 1880, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

55. Cheney, ed., *Louisa May Alcott*, 321.

56. Harris, for example, argued that the difference between Judaism and Christianity lay in the doctrine of the incarnation, which he defined as the "independent existence of what is the same in substance." George Parsons Lathrop, "William Torrey Harris," *Boston Sunday Herald*, 1 August 1880, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

57. Bridgman, ed., "The Order of Lectures—1882," in *Concord Lectures on Philosophy*, 5.

58. A. Bowman Blake ["Mrs. A. B. Blake"], "Philosophy at Concord," *Appleton's Journal*, n.s., 10, no. 55 (January 1881): 67, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

59. Lathrop, "Philosophy and Apples," 654–55.

60. Ellen Mitchell, "Concord School of Philosophy," *Free Religious Index*, n.s. 1, no. 13 (September 23, 1880): 146, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

61. *New York Daily Graphic*, n.d. (ca. 1881), Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

62. "Too Organical for Plain People," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 27 July 1884, 6, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

63. Julius Ward, "The Concord School of Philosophy," *International Review* 9 (October 1880): 459, 461, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

64. "The Concord Revival," *New York Times*, 18 July 1880, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

65. Sanborn, "Emerson and Alcott," 49.

66. Frederic Dan Huntington, quoted in Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 100–101.

67. Frederic Dan Huntington, "The 'Summer School' at Concord," *Churchman* 42, no. 8 (21 August 1880), 8.

68. Ibid., 8. Huntington's first views of transcendentalism while a student at Harvard Divinity School were more measured, when he identified "some new truth in this system of self-styled spiritualism" and called Theodore Parker "a distinguished scholar and clever man" (Huntington to Elizabeth Huntington, 16 May 1840, in Arria S. Huntington, *Memoir and Letters*, 53–54. Six years after the outburst about the Concord School, Huntington seems to have returned to his earlier view, writing that the transcendentalist writers were "stirring in multitudes a sense of the radical difference in all moral and religious and social action between appearance and reality, letter and spirit, make-believe and self-forgetful earnestness" (ibid., 56, quoting *Forum* [June 1886]).

69. "The Philosophy School at Concord," *Boston Evening Traveler*, 21 July 1880, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

70. A. N. Alcott, "Some Impressions of the Concord School of Philosophy," *Free Religious Index* 2, n.s., no. 12 (5 September 1881), 3, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

71. Edwin Mead, "Philosophy at Concord," *Nation*, 29 July 1880, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

72. Cooke, "Concord School of Philosophy."

73. Holland, "Concord School of Philosophy," 602.

74. Elizabeth Peabody, paraphrased in Cooke, "Concord School of Philosophy."

75. Hiram Jones, "Concord Philosophy," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 26 July 1882, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

76. Irenaeus [Samuel I. Prime], "Wise Men of the East," *New York Observer*, 5 August 1882, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

77. Whiting, *Boston Days*, 169–70.

78. Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 153–54.

79. Edwin Mead, "Philosophy at Concord," *Nation*, 29 July 1880, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

80. Sanborn, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, 2:497; see also Warren, "Concord School of Philosophy," 199–233.

81. The Alcotts had moved to the Thoreau family house on Main Street, which Anna Alcott Pratt had bought for her sons and her parents in 1877. Orchard House then stood empty until the summer of 1879, when Harris rented second-floor rooms and the ground floor was used for Concord School of Philosophy sessions. See also Brown, "Alcott and the Concord School of Philosophy," in Cameron, ed., *Concord Harvest*, 2:390.

82. Bickman, *Minding American Education*, 60. An assessment of the spread of Hegelian thought in the mid- to late-nineteenth-century United States can be found in Goetzmann's "Introduction: The American Hegelians."

83. Pochmann, *New England Transcendentalism*, 17.

84. William Torrey Harris, "The Place of the Study of Latin and Greek in Modern Education," lecture delivered to the American Institute of Instruction, 10 July 1879, summary in Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

85. Lathrop, "William Torrey Harris," *Boston Sunday Herald*, 1 August 1880, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

86. "The Concord Philosophers," *Boston Traveler*, 16 July 1880; Cooke, "Concord School of Philosophy"; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 18 August 1879; all Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

87. *Boston Transcript*, 13 July 1880, Harris Scrapbook, CFPL.

88. The phrase appears throughout Kett, *Pursuit of Knowledge*.

Chapter 3. Gender, Reform, and Ridicule

1. Wayne, *Woman Thinking*, 117–22.

2. James to Howells, 21 February 1884, in Edel, *Henry James: Letters*, 3:28.

3. James to Morton Fullerton, 7 November 1902, in Edel, *Henry James: Letters*, 4:249.

4. Edel and Powers, *Complete Notebooks*, 19, 20, 30.

5. Henry James, *The Bostonians*, 1:174.

6. Mary Peabody Mann to Eleanor Lewis, May 1885, typescript copy, Antioch College Library.

7. Henry James to William James, 14 February 1885, in Skrupskelis and Berkeley, *William and Henry James: Selected Letters*, 167.

8. Henry James to William James, 1 May 1878, in Edel, *Henry James: Letters*, 2:170. I am indebted to Mary Frew Moldstad's "Elizabeth Peabody Revisited," which points out that my *Letters of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody* "leave in question her whereabouts at Easter, 1878." This letter from Henry to William clearly locates the reformer in England and in contact with the novelist. As Moldstad observes, "his 1878 letter surely suggests a closer tie with Miss Peabody than he wished to acknowledge to William" in 1885. Moldstad, "Elizabeth Peabody Revisited," 209.

9. Henry James to William James, 14 February 1885, in Skrupskelis and Berkeley, *William and Henry James: Selected Letters*, 167.

10. Henry James to William James, 15 February 1885, ibid., 169.

11. Henry James to William James, 13 June 1886, ibid., 182, 183.

12. See, for example, the extensive review of scholarly debates on this novel in Scott, "Basil, Olive, and Verena."

13. Heaton, "Altered Characterization," 590.

14. Adams, "Critical Notices: *Transcendentalism in New England*," 470–71.

15. Howe, *Later Years*, 157.

16. Mary Pearsall Smith, quoted in Strachey, *Remarkable Relations*, 72.

17. Henry James, *The Bostonians*, 1:26, 27.

18. Mack, "Muse of Satire," 85, emphasis in original. I am grateful to Sallie Hall, whose essay "Henry James and the Bluestockings" called my attention to Mack's work.

19. Dimock, "Gender, the Market," 25–26.

20. Cavallo, "Politics of Latency," 167–68.

21. Ibid., 180.

22. Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union*, 136.

23. Harp, *Positivist Republic*, 19. For recent treatments of Comte in the context of contemporary theory see Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity*, and Gane, *Auguste Comte*.

24. Cashdollar, "European Positivism," 492.

25. Peabody, "Being of God," 248. Peabody signed many of her writings, including this essay, with the initials "E.P.P." Such instances are indicated in the bibliography.

26. Joseph Henry Allen, "Religion of Humanity," 57–58.

27. Peabody, "Plan of the West Roxbury Community," 361, 370–72.

28. Peabody, "Fourierism," 480.

29. Peabody, "Glimpse of Christ's Idea," 225, 226.

30. Henry James, *The Bostonians*, 1:179–80.

31. For a study of these biographies and useful insights into Victorian biographizing, see Habich, *Building Their Own Waldos.*

32. This dramatic story is well recounted in Petrulionis, *To Set This World Right*, 148–52.

33. Sanborn to John Chadwick, 6 February 1899, Correspondence of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bms am 1162.10. Sanborn is referring to Frothingham's *Theodore Parker: A Biography*.

34. "Alcott's Memoirs," *Nation*, 103; "Sanborn's Thoreau," *Nation*, 34.

35. Hickok, "Political and Literary Careers," 310.

36. Review of *Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau* in *Nation* 59, no. 1529 (18 October 1894): 291–92.

37. Harding, "Franklin B. Sanborn and Thoreau's Letters."

38. Hickok, "Political and Literary Careers," 319; the entire episode is found on 311–27.

39. Francis Allen, *Thoreau's Editors*, 14–15.

40. Higginson, *Part of a Man's Life*, 24.

41. James, *The Bostonians*, 3:397–400.

42. Ibid., 396, 397.

43. Peabody, *Reminiscences*. For a recent treatment of this volume, see Cole, "Elizabeth Peabody in the Nineteenth Century, 131–51.

44. Peabody, "Emerson as Preacher," 147.
45. Wiggin, *My Garden of Memory*, 150.
46. Anagnos, *Philosophiae Quaestor*, 2:406.
47. Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 306–10.
48. Peabody, "Kindergarten Culture."
49. Peabody, "Relations between the Kindergarten."
50. Peabody, "Glimpse of Christ's Idea," 226.
51. Beecher, quoted in Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 789.
52. Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 50.
53. Elshtain, "A Return to Hull-House," xxii.
54. Addams, "Subjective Necessity," 18.
55. Ibid.
56. Peabody, "Kindergarten Culture," 356.
57. Addams, "Subjective Necessity," 25.

Chapter 4. Charles Ives

The epigraph is from Brian Teare, *Transcendental Grammar Crown* (San Leandro, Calif.: Woodland Editions, 2006)

1. Taylor's argument throughout *A Secular Age* is that, for many people in the modern and contemporary eras, neither unwavering commitment to a religious faith nor trust in scientific materialism is sufficient; rather, he says, both "sides" understand something of the appeal of the other, and thus appeals to completely "closed world systems" are unconvincing. "Fragilization," as he calls it, "is then increased by the fact that great numbers of people are not firmly embedded in any such context, but are puzzled, cross-pressured, or have constituted by bricolage a sort of median position" (556). See also Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 548–50.

2. Werman, "Normal and Pathological Nostalgia," 391, 393.

3. See Cowell and Cowell, *Charles Ives and His Music*, 35.

4. Quoted in Charles Ives, *Essays before a Sonata*, 67.

5. Adams, *Education of Henry Adams*, 7–8. I am indebted to Carol Baron's review of Stuart Feder's biography of Ives ("What Motivated Charles Ives"), in which she corrects the biographer's efforts to find dichotomies and dualities everywhere in Ives's life and art.

6. Broyles and Von Glahn, "Later Manifestations of Concord," 576.

7. Kirkpatrick, ed., *Charles E. Ives: Memos*, 49, 201.

8. Carter, "The Case of Mr. Ives," 174.

9. Biographical material on Ives here and throughout is drawn from Feder, *Charles Ives: "My Father's Song"*; Magee, *Charles Ives Reconsidered*; Rossiter, *Charles Ives and His America*; and Cowell and Cowell, *Charles Ives and His Music*.

10. Kirkpatrick, ed., *Charles E. Ives: Memos*, 46, 115.

11. Ibid., 47.

12. Ibid., 48.

13. Ibid., 182.

14. Ibid., 202.

15. Burkholder, *Ideas behind the Music*, 110–11.

16. Ibid., 106–7.

17. Louis Untermeyer, quoted in Perlis, ed., *Charles Ives Remembered*, 212; Swafford, *Charles Ives: A Life with Music*, 291. Swafford's book has influenced my understanding and appreciation of Ives and his musical accomplishments.

18. Teichgraeber, "'Our National Glory.'"

19. Holmes, quoted in Randall Fuller, *Emerson's Ghosts*, 34.

20. Brodhead, *School of Hawthorne*, 51–52; Edwin H. Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place*, 295.

21. Paul, *Charles Ives in the Mirror*, 18–23.

22. Brooks, "America's Coming-of-Age," in *Three Essays on America*, 56–57.

23. Swafford, *Charles Ives: A Life with Music*, 292.

24. Burkholder, *Ideas behind the Music*, 31.

25. Ibid., 24.

26. Ives, *Essays before a Sonata*, 47, 46.

27. Ibid., 47–48.

28. Ibid., 42.

29. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Celestial Rail-road," 817.

30. Ives, *Essays before a Sonata*, 41–42.

31. Brodhead, *School of Hawthorne*, 61.

32. Ives, *Essays before a Sonata*, 41.

33. Ibid., 63, 65.

34. Ibid., 64, 67.

35. Ibid., 53–54.

36. Thoreau, *Walden*, 210, 214–15, 218.

37. Ibid., 216–17.

38. Ives, *Essays before a Sonata*, 58.

39. Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau, as Remembered*, 9–10.

40. Randall Fuller, *Emerson's Ghosts*, 29, emphasis in original.

41. Ives, *Essays before a Sonata*, 31, 33, 35.

42. Ibid., 35.

43. Burkholder, *Ideas behind the Music*, 26.

44. Ives, *Essays before a Sonata*, 14, 17.

45. Ibid., 71, 75, 76, my emphasis.

46. Ibid., 92, 84. We should not exaggerate Ives's hostility to the art of his age, however. His nephew Brewster Ives recalled that his uncle "always had respect for new ideas, whether they were expressed in the business world or in the field of arts. I know that he was interested in Picasso, Matisse, John Marin, and many other artists. And I remember spending many an evening with him discussing modern painters and their approach to painting. He was fascinated with a new approach to painting or a new approach to sculpture." Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered*, 79.

47. Ives, *Essays before a Sonata*, 91, 101.

48. Sebastian, "Charles Ives at Last."

49. "Insurance Man," 44.

50. Elliot Carter, quoted in Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered*, 138.

51. Carter, "Ives Today," 201.

52. Slonimsky, "Composer Who Has Clung."

53. Rudhyar, "Birth of the Transcendental Movement."

54. Rosenfeld, "Ives's 'Concord Sonata,'" 110, 111, 112.

55. Elliott Carter had seen and heard the sonata even earlier, thanks again to Heyman, who played parts of it for him at her apartment in New York City in 1924 or 1925; Carter, in Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered*, 133.

56. Gilman, "Masterpiece of American Music." Also quoting Van Wyck Brooks, *The Flowering of New England: 1815–1865* (New York: Dutton, 1936), 530.

57. Magee, *Charles Ives Reconsidered*, 166–70.

58. Lang, "Hearing Things: Charles Ives," 44.

59. Briggs to Ives, 27 August 1921, in Owens, ed., *Selected Correspondence of Charles Ives*, 73–74.

60. Bellamann, "Reviews: 'Concord, Mass., 1840–1860,'" *Double Dealer*, 166, 169.

61. Elbert, *Hunger for Home*.

62. Brooks, "America's Coming-of-Age," 58.

63. Botstein, "Innovation and Nostalgia," 42, 43, 48. While the focus in this chapter has been on the *Concord* Sonata and *Essays* for their obvious links to transcendentalism, many other Ives works might serve as equally fine examples of what I call his "transcendentalist compositional aesthetic." Jan Swafford provides an excellent reading of the Fourth Symphony, detailing its interweaving of hymn tunes, Civil War–era songs, and ragtime melodies with richly inventive connecting material (Swafford, *Charles Ives: A Life with Music*, 351–65). In the Second Violin Sonata, composed between 1907 and 1913 (at the same time as sections of the *Concord*), Ives abandoned the traditional sonata A–B–A form: "here," writes David Johnson, "the listener must often grope his way through seemingly uncharted seas, longing in vain for the return of repetition of previous material." Instead, we find shards of "Dixie," "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground," "Marching through Georgia," and "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean" together with recurrences of "Ode to Joy." These elements are interspersed with impressively dissonant writing of instrument against instrument; as Johnson puts it regarding the quartet's second movement, "the string writing in this movement is of the utmost difficulty, the rhythms crisp and fierce, recalling Bartok" (Johnson, liner notes to *Charles Ives: The Two String Quartets*, 1967).

64. Botstein, "Innovation and Nostalgia," 64.

65. I encountered this situation in playing recordings of several Ives compositions, including sections of the Fourth Symphony, in my graduate course on transcendentalism at Colorado State University in fall 2012. Students were intrigued by Ives and the kind of musical "mash-up" they had already experienced in music of their own era, but were mostly unfamiliar with the quotations from band music and hymns.

Chapter 5. Joseph Cornell

1. Solomon, *Utopia Parkway*, 144–45.

2. Ades, "Transcendental Surrealism of Joseph Cornell," 39.

3. Ratcliff, "Joseph Cornell, Mechanic of the Ineffable," 47.

4. Blair, *Joseph Cornell's Vision*, 37–38.

5. Biographical information on Cornell's childhood is drawn from Solomon, *Utopia Parkway*, Blair, *Joseph Cornell's Vision*, and Hartigan, "Joseph Cornell: A Biography."

6. Humphrey Carpenter, *Secret Gardens*, 11–17. While we are not sure about Cornell's youthful fictional reading, it would not be surprising if he preferred the English texts to the American, the introspective to the assertively outdoor. As for the reading we do know about, that too came into his hands just in time, bearing the stamp of cultural approval. The fairy and folk tales like the ones he was absorbing would have been forbidden by his Dutch Calvinist ancestors and their Anglo-American counterparts from the seventeenth century well into the nineteenth. Typical of this criticism is this anonymous early eighteenth-century *History of Genesis*, whose author counseled parents to "throw away all fond amorous Romances, and fabulous Histories of Giants, the bombast Achievements of Knight Errantry, and the like; for these fill the Heads of Children with vain, silly and idle imaginations." Quoted in Summerfield, *Fantasy and Reason*, 33.

7. Solomon, *Utopia Parkway*, 14.

8. One wonders if Joseph was aware of Lawrence as the site of the famous "Bread and Roses" strike in 1912, or whether he was resented by the largely immigrant labor force there, given his status as an Andover boy taking work from those more in need of employment.

9. Solomon, *Utopia Parkway*, 33, 43.

10. Diary entry, November 26, 1948, Joseph Cornell Papers, 1804–1986, bulk 1939–1972 (hereafter "Cornell Papers"), box 6, folder 5.

11. Hartigan, "Joseph Cornell: A Biography," 96.

12. *Harper's Bazaar* review and Cornell's response to Alfred Barr quoted in Ades, "Transcendental Surrealism," 19.

13. "GC 44" dossier, August 17, 1945, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 46.

14. Conkin, *American Originals*, 239. Other useful sources on Christian Science and the larger New Thought movement include Gottschalk, *Emergence of Christian Science*; Peel, *Christian Science*; Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*; and Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, chap. 60.

15. Diary entry, December 8, 1949, Cornell Papers, box 6, folder 5. In reproducing manuscript and typescript entries from Cornell's diaries and the "GC 44" dossier, I have tried to retain the integrity of the original by indicating, wherever possible, emendation, deletions, and insertions. Deletions are struck through, ~~like this~~, and interlinear insertions are placed between upward and downward pointing arrows, ↑like this↓. Cornell's underlinings are set in italics.

16. Starr, *Joseph Cornell: Art and Metaphysics*, 1.

17. Vine, "Eterniday," 39.

18. Bronson Alcott to Mary Baker Glover, 17 January 1876, in Alcott, *Letters*, 664.

19. Alcott, *Journals*, 2:464, 465, 489–90.

20. Peel, *Christian Science*, 90.

21. Alcott, *Journals*, 1:76–77.

22. "GC 44" dossier, May 13, 1944, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 45.

23. "GC 44" dossier, August 17, 1946, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 49.

24. Ibid.

25. Original letter dated November 21, 1946, recopied and edited by Cornell and dated February 27, 1950, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 47.

26. Diary entry, August 21, 1945, Cornell Papers, box 6, folder 2.

27. "GC 44" dossier, May 23, 1947, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 48.

28. "GC 44" dossier, August 21, 1947, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 48.

29. "GC 44" dossier, April 7, 1946, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 47.

30. "GC 44" dossier, ca. 1948, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 49.

31. In *Joseph Cornell's Theatre of the Mind*, Mary Ann Caws writes that "the 'metaphysic of the ephemera,' a phrase that Cornell often used, betokens the passion he devoted to the wandering portion of his days, tracking down the trivial elements for his boxes which he saw as linked to a greater philosophical system. He took the term from the nineteenth-century French Romantic poet and novelist Gerard de Nerval, who wanted to indicate the supreme importance of the smallest things once the imagination transforms them" (136).

32. "GC 44" dossier, ca. 1948, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 49.

33. Ibid. Although Cornell's experiences riding to and from the Garden Centre in 1946 were often as fresh and lively as the original ones in 1944, he did at least once despair of recapturing the primal moment. After summarizing the turn of events that led him to his job at the Centre, he writes, "Never have I felt closer to the more desirable side of the dream state, so consciously with its transcendent sense of spiritual ↑harmony &↓ satisfaction. . . . And so I attempt now (just 2 yrs later) to recapture the ↑nuance of the↓ adventure in some of the moments & minutes & hours of that spring summer & autumn, despairing of ever doing more than the faintest justice to their elusive charm." "GC 44" dossier, April 7, 1946, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 47.

34. Diary entry, March 19/20, 1952, Cornell Papers, box 6, folder 12.

35. "GC 44" dossier, January 12, 1947, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 48.

36. "GC 44" dossier, September 28, 1948, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 49.

37. "GC 44" dossier, winter 1948/49, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 49.

38. "GC 44" dossier, March 13, 1950, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 51.

39. "GC 44" dossier, "random notes," ca. 1951, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 52.

40. Diary entry, February 1970, Cornell Papers, box 9, folder 37.

41. "GC 44" dossier, August 3, 1951, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 52.

42. "GC 44" dossier, undated, Cornell Papers, box 15, folder 4.

43. "GC 44" dossier, November 14, 1953, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 53.

44. Diary entry, undated, ca. 1949, Cornell Papers, box 6, folder 6.

45. Diary entry, January 24, 1947, Cornell Papers, Box 6, folder 4.

46. "GC 44" dossier, May 5, 1949, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 50.

47. "GC 44" dossier, August 6, 1951, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 52.

48. "GC 44" dossier, undated, ca. 1951, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 52.

49. "GC 44" dossier, undated, ca. 1951, box 15, folder 4.

50. Wordsworth, "Preface [1800]," 235.

51. Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," 272.

52. Alcott, *Concord Days*, 237.

53. Blair, *Joseph Cornell's Vision*, 37–38.

54. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," 1:10.

55. Thoreau, *Writings: Journal (1837–1844)*, 1:50–51.

56. Thoreau, *Writings: Journal (1848–1851)*, 3:251.

57. Fuller to Tuckerman, 21 October 1838, in Hudspeth, *Letters of Margaret Fuller*, 1: 347–48.

58. Peabody, "A Vision," 100. Diane Brown Jones offers a useful analysis of this work in "Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's Transcendental Manifesto." See also Argersinger and Cole, "Introduction," *Toward a Female Genealogy*, 15.

59. The best treatment of the mystic traditions informing Cornell's work and his practice of reenchanting the material world is Vine's "Eterniday." Classic treatments of the mystic tradition, largely (though not wholly) within a Christian context, include Underhill, *Mysticism* (1911), and William James, *Varieties of Religion Experience* (1902).

60. Blair, *Joseph Cornell's Vision*, 98.

61. "GC 44" dossier, May 13, 1944, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 45.

62. "GC 44" dossier, August 17, 1946, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 49.

63. "GC 44" dossier, August 21, 1945, Cornell Papers, box 6, folder 2.

64. André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 3–4, 13.

65. Alcott, "Psyche," 2:122, 118.

66. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," 42.

67. Thoreau, *Writings: Journal (1848–1851)*, 3:305.

68. Blair, *Joseph Cornell's Vision*, 129; Starr, introduction to *Joseph Cornell: "The Crystal Cage."*

69. Starr, introduction to *Joseph Cornell: "The Crystal Cage."*

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Vine, "Eterniday," 43.

73. For an extended discussion of this issue in nineteenth-century British culture see Shuttleworth, *Mind of the Child*.

74. "GC 44" dossier, March 28, 1947, Cornell Papers, box 14, folder 48.

75. Poe, "Berenice," 233.

76. "Notes on Bébé Marie Doll, ca. 1965," Cornell Papers, box 1, folder 19.

77. Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, 38.

78. Peabody, "Explanatory Preface," viii.

79. Blair, *Joseph Cornell's Vision*, 113.

80. Ibid., 112.

81. See Caws, *Joseph Cornell's Theatre of the Mind*, 32–43.

Chapter 6. Truman Nelson

1. Santayana, "Genteel Tradition," 243–49, 252–53. Frederick Carpenter answered Santayana's strictures in "The Genteel Tradition: A Re-Interpretation," in which Carpenter traced genteel culture to only one strand in the Puritan tradition, a moralism that

stressed conventional behavior and institutional authority. Transcendentalism, Carpenter argued, had nothing to do with that aspect of Puritanism, but rather (as Perry Miller would also argue) recovered its radical, antinomian strain.

2. Mumford, typescript of *The Golden Day*, Mumford Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

3. See Matthiessen, *American Renaissance.*

4. Parrington, *Main Currents*, 2:384–85.

5. Calverton, *Liberation of American Literature*, 246, 259, 269.

6. Perry Miller, "Introduction," *Transcendentalists: An Anthology*, 8, 12.

7. Ibid., 14.

8. King, "Legacy of Creative Protest," 42–43. See also King's more popular version of his acknowledgement of Thoreau's influence in King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 51. In "The Life and Legacy of 'Civil Disobedience,'" Linck Johnson suggests that King may have wanted to gesture toward Thoreau as a way of building support among white liberals who might otherwise have found civil disobedience too uncomfortable a method of social change (629–41).

9. Nojeim, *Gandhi and King*, 85, 94–99, 173.

10. King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," 89.

11. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," 136.

12. von Frank, *Trials of Anthony Burns*, 284.

13. King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," 98.

14. Coles, "Words and Music," 271–72.

15. Biographical information is drawn from Nelson, "On Creating Revolutionary Art," typescript, in Truman Nelson Papers, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University (hereafter "Nelson Papers"), retitled and published as "On Creating Revolutionary Art and Going Out of Print," in Schafer, ed., *The Truman Nelson Reader*, 160–76, and from author's personal interview with Garrison Nelson. Information on Helen Maria Nelson's security clearance is drawn from A. Tyler Port, Director, U.S. Department of Defense Office of Industrial Personnel, Security Review, to Helen Maria Nelson, 21 May 1955, Nelson Papers.

16. Ferrini, personal interview with author, Gloucester, Mass., 12 October 2006.

17. Undated typescript, probably Truman Nelson to Harry Levin, Nelson Papers.

18. Nelson to F. O. Matthiessen, 12 June 1949, Francis Otto Matthiessen Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

19. Undated typescript, probably Truman Nelson to Harry Levin, Nelson Papers.

20. Richard Boyer to Angus Cameron, 4 August 1950, Nelson Papers.

21. Miller, "To Make Men Free."

22. Nelson, in McNiff, "Truman Nelson: An Interview with Shaun A. McNiff," 286.

23. Nelson, *Sin of the Prophet*, 111.

24. Ibid., 450.

25. Ibid., 112.

26. von Frank, *Trials of Anthony Burns*, 61.

27. Nelson, *Sin of the Prophet*, 158.

28. Ibid., 450.

29. Richard Boyer to Angus Cameron, 4 August 1950, Nelson Papers.

30. Nelson, *Sin of the Prophet*, 245.

31. Nelson, "On Creating Revolutionary Art and Going Out of Print," 168.

32. Nelson, *Passion by the Brook*, 26.

33. Ibid., 59, 63, 102.

34. Ibid., 352, 355.

35. Ibid., 52.

36. Nelson to Kenneth Woodward, 23 December 1955, Nelson Papers.

37. Thoreau's sister and literary executor Sophia Thoreau named Blake to be her successor, and Henry's manuscripts passed to Blake upon her death. Following an editorial custom of the era, Blake assembled a series of extracts from Thoreau's Journal, publishing these in 1881, 1884, 1888, and 1892. In creating these volumes, Blake damaged several manuscript sheets and eventually lost an entire volume of the manuscript journal, the one for 1840–1841. For an excellent account of the dispersal of Thoreau's Journal and its reassembly at the Morgan Library, see Howarth and Sattelmeyer, "General Introduction," 1:578–91.

38. Miller, *Consciousness in Concord*, 127.

39. Ibid., 34.

40. Nelson, undated typescript fragment, Nelson Papers.

41. Nelson to Van Wyck Brooks, 13 November 1958, Van Wyck Brooks Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania (hereafter "Brooks Papers").

42. Miller, "One Night in the Concord Jail."

43. Nelson to Van Wyck Brooks, "Thanksgiving Day" [27 November], 1958, Brooks Papers.

44. McNiff, "Truman Nelson: An Interview with Shaun A. McNiff," 279, 281, 289.

45. Miller, *Consciousness in Concord*, 48.

46. Nelson, "Thoreau and John Brown," 139, 144. This essay was also published in slightly different form under the title "Thoreau and the Paralysis of Individualism" in *Ramparts*, March 1966, 16–26.

47. Ibid., 144, 152.

48. Ibid., 139.

49. Ibid., 152.

50. Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," 115.

51. Nelson to Kenneth Woodward, 23 December 1955, Nelson Papers.

52. Nelson, "Theodore Parker as Revolutionary," 71.

53. Ibid., 73, 74, 75.

54. Ibid., 79.

55. Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," 115; Savio, "'Bodies on the Gears' Speech," 188.

56. Lawrence and Lee, *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, vi. Lawrence and Lee are also the authors of *Inherit the Wind* (1955), about the Scopes Trial in 1925.

57. Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 55.

58. Reich, *The Greening of America*, 262.

59. Roszak, *Making of a Counterculture*.

60. Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," 210.

61. Nelson to Judges of the Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund, nd, Nelson Papers.

62. Nelson, "On Creating Revolutionary Art," 11–12, Nelson Papers, and in "On Creating Revolutionary Art and Going Out of Print," in Schafer, ed., *The Truman Nelson Reader*, 166.

63. Ibid., 12. Nelson's quote here is a faulty transcription of text to be found in Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (London: Hogarth, 1939), 171, 172–73.

64. Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 306, 312, emphasis in original.

65. McNiff, " Truman Nelson: An Interview with Shaun A. McNiff," 281–83.

66. Mitgang, "Kansas Firebrand," *New York Times*, 17 April 1960, clipping in Nelson Papers.

67. DuBois, review of *The Surveyor*, in *National Guardian*, 6 June 1960, clipping in Nelson Papers.

68. Furnas, *Road to Harpers Ferry*, 33.

69. Nelson, "A Key to John Brown: A Sense of Loss," undated review of *A John Brown Reader*, ed. Louis Ruchames, in Nelson Papers.

70. Nelson, "John Brown Revisited," 410.

71. Nelson, undated fragment, Nelson Papers.

72. Nelson, "The Conscience of the North," 267.

73. Nelson, *Torture of Mothers*.

74. Nelson, *Right of Revolution*, 7, 41.

75. Ibid., 35, 97, 110.

76. Ibid., 119.

77. Nelson, "Thoreau and John Brown," 138.

78. Capper, "A Little Beyond," 22.

79. In *The Right of Revolution*, Nelson writes, "The Confederate flag, the battle emblem of a slave-whipping, slave-degrading, and slave-killing society which went down to deserved defeat a hundred years ago began to appear at the head of hundreds of marches by white Southerners to besiege a school when an attempt to desegregate was being made, to shove aside and spit in the faces of some small, helpless and vulnerable black children trying to get their education in the regular way. It waved proudly at the orgies of moronic white racist students at the few universities trying to desegregate . . . invariably paired with 'Nigger go home' signs and like national obscenities. Long before this it had a tradition of waving over gross offenses against Southern black people at the hands of night riders, lynchers and burners-alivers. I saw it myself, flying on the antennas of U.S. Army staff cars" (121–22).

80. Nelson, undated fragment, possibly to Harry Levin, Nelson Papers.

Chapter 7. Beston, Oliver, Dillard, and Fluid Transcendentalism

1. Emerson, *Nature*, in *Collected Works*, 1:10, 35.

2. Very, "The Dead," in *Transcendentalism: A Reader*, 533–34.

3. Fuller, "The Great Lawsuit," 418.

4. Thoreau, *Walden*, 138.

5. Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 23.

6. Robinson, *Natural Life*, 19, 95.

7. Richardson, "Introduction: Thoreau's Broken Task," 8–9.

8. Thoreau, *The Dispersion of Seeds*, 24, 25–26, 31.

9. Ibid., 36.

10. Ibid., 130.

11. Walls, "Believing in Nature," 22.

12. Bennett, *Enchantment of Modern Life*, 84.

13. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2–3, 13, emphasis in original.

14. Oppermann, "From Ecological Postmodernism," 29.

15. Thoreau, *Walden*, 221, 316–17.

16. Rigby, "Spirits That Matter," 288.

17. Thoreau, *Walden*, 317–18.

18. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 15.

19. Beston to Scott, in Scott, *Exiles and Fabrications*, 176.

20. "Many of his [Beston's] observations and interpretations, in fact, seem to spring more from imagination than from nature." Finch, introduction to Beston, *The Outermost House*, xviii.

21. Beston, *The Outermost House* [1928], 24, 25, 94–95.

22. Walls, "Believing in Nature," 18.

23. Oliver, "Emerson: An Introduction," 48, 46, 50.

24. McNew, "Mary Oliver and the Tradition," 68, 69. Other essays that treat Oliver's poetic desire to reinhabit a vital cosmos are Bonds, "Language of Nature," and Graham, "'Into the Body of Another.'"

25. Oliver, "The Sea," in *American Primitive*, 69–70.

26. McNew, "Mary Oliver and the Tradition," 72.

27. Rigby, "Spirits that Matter," 283.

28. Thoreau, *Walden*, 98. Here I repeat Wesley Mott's and David Robinson's observation that transcendentalism and its adherents were misnamed with labels that suggested vague otherworldliness and lack of interest in the material and social world.

29. Oppermann, "From Ecological Postmodernism," 21.

30. Graham, "'Into the Body of Another,'" 367.

31. Oliver, "The Lilies Break Open Over the Dark Water," in *New and Selected Poems*, 1:88–89.

32. Albin, "A Ray of Relation"; Lavery, "Noticer"; Chenetier, "Tinkering, Extravagance," 160. See also McClintock, "'Pray without Ceasing'"; McIlroy, "'The Sparer Climate for Which I Longed'"; and Webb, "Nature's Spendthrift Economy."

33. Hardack, "'A *Woman* Need Not Be Sincere.'"

34. Dillard, *Teaching a Stone*, 170.

35. Dillard, *An American Childhood*, 134, 132, 238–39.

36. Albin, "A Ray of Relation," 17–18.

37. Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 11, 32; Thoreau, *Walden*, 312.

38. Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 17, 31, 33, 198.
39. Webb, "Nature's Spendthrift Economy," 429.
40. Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 174.
41. Dillard, *Holy the Firm*, 42–43.
42. Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 178.
43. Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, 64, 71.
44. See Webb, "Nature's Spendthrift Economy," 435–36.
45. Dillard, *Living by Fiction*, 136, 185.
46. Ibid., 11.
47. Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 177.
48. Dillard, *Teaching a Stone*, 68, 72, 150–51.
49. The phrase is based in the title of Richard Hardack's essay, "'A *Woman* Need Not Be Sincere': Annie Dillard's Fictional Autobiographies and the Gender Politics of American Transcendentalism."
50. Richard White, "A Review."
51. Dillard, *The Living*, 241.
52. Ibid., 130.
53. Ibid., 136.
54. Hardack, "'A *Woman* Need Not Be Sincere,'" 90.
55. Emerson, "American Scholar," 55.
56. Ibid., 373–74.
57. Ibid., 353.
58. Dillard, *The Maytrees*, 33, 1, 15, 209.
59. Dillard, *For the Time Being*, 85.
60. Ibid., 118.
61. Dillard, *Living by Fiction*, 185.

Epilogue

1. Capper, "'A Little Beyond,'" 3, 3–4.
2. Bercovitch, "Problem of Ideology," 365, emphasis in original.
3. Rowe, *At Emerson's Tomb*, 5.
4. Hardack, "*Not Altogether Human*."
5. Carafiol, *American Ideal*, 42–43.
6. Schulz, "Pond Scum," 40, 45.
7. Stevenson, "Henry David Thoreau: His Character and Opinions," 166
8. Cheever, *American Bloomsbury*, 200.
9. Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman behind "Little Women."*
10. Cosbey, "Thoreau and This Rat Race."
11. Hayden et al., "Port Huron Statement," 299, 300.
12. Curtis White, "Spirit of Disobedience," 35.
13. Simone Weil, quoted in White, 40. The quotes are from *Gravity and Grace*.
14. Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 6–7; see also Albanese, *Corresponding Motion*.
15. Kripal, "From Emerson to Esalen," B8.

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INDEX

Abbot, Francis Ellingwood: and Free Religious Association, formation of, 40; and Free Religious Association, publications of, 42–43; and rejection of Christian identity, 41; religious radicalism in, 39; and transcendentalism, 46
Adams, Henry: parallels with Charles Ives, 85–86; and ridicule of transcendentalists, 65
Addams, Jane, 6, 19, 48; and comparisons with Elizabeth Peabody, 93–94; and connections with transcendentalism, 93
Ades, Dawn, 213, 214, 223
Adorno, Theodore, 68, 180
Agassiz, Louis, 177
Ahlstrom, Sydney, 80
Albanese, Catherine, 202
Albin, C. D., 187
Alcott, Amos Bronson: at Chestnut Street Club, 43; and childhood, 135, 139; and Christian Science, 116, 123–24; and Concord School of Philosophy, 46–50, 54, 56, 57; and Ives's *Essays before a Sonata*, 94–95, 96, 101, 103; and mysticism, 132; return to religious orthodoxy, 54; Sanborn's biographies of, 74, 75; and Temple School, 32, 69, 139; and transcendentalism's utopian mission, 13; Truman Nelson's references to, 160, 163. *See also* Concord School of Philosophy
Alcott, A. N., 54
Alcott, Louisa May, 38, 81, 200; and Concord School of Philosophy, attitudes toward, 51; and transcendentalism, contemporary views of, 199
Alexander, J. W., 28
Allen, Francis H., 158
Allen, Joseph Henry, 71
American Studies movement, 197
Ammons, A. R., 7
Andersen, Hans Christian, 117
Argersinger, Jana, 2

Babbitt, Irving, 144
Balzac, Honoré de, 62
Baron, Carol, 211n5
Barr, Alfred, 121, 214n12
Bartlett, George, 55, 207n38
Bartol, Cyrus, 40, 48, 56
Baudelaire, Charles, 131
Bébé-Marie (Cornell), 115, 134, 135, 138–40
Beecher, Henry Ward, 80, 89
Bellamann, Henry, 105, 109, 110
Bellamy, Edward, 80
Bellingham, Wash., 191
Bellows, Henry, 38, 39
Bennett, Jane, 35, 175; and Adorno, cites, 180; Beston anticipates, 181; and "thing-power," 178; and Thoreau, 179
Benton, Elizabeth Cornell, 117
Bercovitch, Sacvan, 197
"Berenice" (Poe), 137, 138
Berger, Peter, 4, 21
Berry, Wendell, 36
Beston, Henry, 7, 8, 9, 36; and "fluid transcendentalism," 174, 180–81; and "new materialism," 35; *The Outermost House*, 180–81

"Black Lives Matter," 36, 171
Blake, Harrison Gray Otis, 50, 99, 158
Blumenberg, Hans, 20, 21
Boston Daily Advertiser, 26, 49, 50, 58
Bowen, Francis, 27, 29, 31
Briggs, John Cornelius, 109, 110
Brook Farm: and Huntington, Frederic Dan, attacked by, 53–54; as model for 1960s communitarianism, 165; in *The Passion by the Brook* (Nelson), 154–55, 163; and social gospel, inspires advocates of, 80, 91
Brown, John: Nelson's admiration for, 158, 161, 167–69, 171; in *The Surveyor*, 163, 166; and Thoreau, 162; and transcendentalists, championed by, 73–74
Brownson, Orestes: and critique of transcendentalism, 29–30, 38; and defense of Emerson, 2; portrayed in *The Passion by the Brook* (Nelson), 157
Burns, Anthony: Ives on Alcott's effort to rescue, 95; Nelson on efforts to rescue, 151, 153, 154; Thoreau on efforts to rescue, 149, 162

Calverton, Victor, 145
Cameron, Angus, 150, 152
Capper, Charles, 2, 171, 197
Carafiol, Peter, 198
Carlyle, Thomas, 26, 27
Carter, Elliott, 106, 213n55
Channing, Ellery, 47, 75, 97, 99, 147, 186
Channing, William Ellery, 77
Channing, William Henry, 43, 44
Chautauqua Institution, 49, 61
Cheney, Ednah Dow: as advocate for Margaret Fuller's feminism, 59, 143; and Concord School of Philosophy, 48, 49, 59; as contributor to Free Religious Association publications, 42, 43
childhood: in *Bébé Marie* (Cornell), 138, 139, 141; and Cornell, thematic treatment of, 116, 118, 120, 134; Cornell's focus on real-life children and youth, 141; in *The Crystal Cage* (Cornell), 136, 137; and education, 77; in "GC 44" (Cornell), 125, 128, 134; Peabody's interest in, 78; romantic and transcendentalist treatments of, 135, 139–40
Christian Examiner, 25, 26, 27
Christian Science, 121–22. *See also* Cornell, Joseph; Eddy, Mary Baker Glover
Civil Rights Movement, 36, 147, 148, 162, 168, 169
Civil War, 38, 64, 65; centennial celebration of, 168, 169; as supposed end to transcendentalism, 3, 76, 143, 158
Clarke, James Freeman, 38, 39, 40, 73
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 25, 27, 93, 132, 142, 176
Coles, Robert, 149
Comte, Auguste, 70, 71, 80
Concord, Mass.: and Concord School of Philosophy, attitudes of residents toward, 50, 52; —, as site of, 47, 49–50; controversial reputation of, 48, 49; Ives's idealistic portrayal of, 95, 96, 102, 104; Peabody's celebration of, 78; and rescue of Sanborn, 74
Concord Club, 47
Concord School of Philosophy: founding of, 46–48; humorous criticisms of, 52; identity under Harris's leadership, 57–58; intellectual reputation of, 49; and interpretations of transcendentalism, 6, 46, 52, 57; negative criticisms of, 53–55; as social center, 51; women attendees and speakers at, 59. *See also* Alcott, Amos Bronson; Harris, William Torrey; Sanborn, Franklin Benjamin
Cooke, George Willis, 43, 44; and criticism of the Concord School, 55, 58
Cornell, Joseph: affinity for nature of, 125; attraction to girls and young women, 141; childhood as subject matter of, 134–35, 140; childhood of, 116, 118,

140; and Christian Science, attitudes toward, 121; and Dadaism, 120; "dossiers" of, 115; early employment of, 119; early reading, of, 117, 214n6; family circumstances of, 116, 118–19; fascination with material objects, 119–20, 128, 131; literary and cultural influences on, 124, 131; and mysticism, 127, 129, 131–33; transcendentalist echoes in, 115–16, 133, 139, 142
Cornell, works of: *Bébé Marie*, and discourses of childhood, 139; —, and Cornell's fascination with children, 140–41; *The Crystal Cage*, description of, 135–38; —, and "fluid transcendentalism," 134; —, and Poe's "Berenice," 138; —, and portrayals of childhood, 136–37; "GC 44," 124–31; —, accumulation of, 125; —, description of, 135–38; —, "fluid transcendentalism" in, 133; —, method of, 130
Cowell, Henry, 105, 107, 108
Cowell, Sidney, 105, 107, 108

Danbury, Conn., 86, 87, 95, 96, 110
Darwinism, 57, 158
deism, 23
Dial, The, 32, 38, 92, 93; Concord School of Philosophy remembers, 57; Huntington attacks, 53
Diderot, Denis, 15, 19
Dillard, Annie: critical responses to, 186, 187; and ecocriticism, 175; and fluid transcendentalism, 9, 35, 36; and Nelson, compared to, 146; and nineteenth-century transcendentalism, 8, 186
Dillard, Annie, works of: *An American Childhood*, 187; *The Living*, 191–92; —, and decentering of self, 193; *Living by Fiction*, 189, 190; *The Maytrees*, 194–95; —, and the secular turn, 195; *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 174; —, composition of, 186; —, and horror at nature's cruelty, 188, 189; —, and material world, 187

ecopoetics, 193
Eddy, Mary Baker Glover: and Alcott, 123–24; Alcott's second thoughts concerning, 123; praised by Cornell, 121; views of material world, 116, 122
education, 6, 47, 49, 57
educational reform: embraced by antebellum transcendentalists, 12, 15, 32, 47; late nineteenth-century reformers' attitudes toward, 57, 68–70; and women's rights movements, 61. *See also* kindergarten movement
Edwards, Jonathan, 14
Emerson, Mary Moody, 2, 30, 199
Emerson, Ralph Waldo: Chestnut Street Club attendance at, 43; on children and childhood, 135, 175; Coleridge's influence on, 25; at Concord School of Philosophy, 48, 56; Concord School of Philosophy memorial celebration of, 56–57, 77–78; contemporary criticisms of, 27; in Dillard's work, 186–87; "The Divinity School Address," 27; and "fluid transcendentalism," 35, 175; and Free Religion movement, 40, 41; Harris's criticisms of, 56–57; Huntington's criticism of, 54; and Ives family, influence on, 86–87, 90; Ives's treatment of, 102–3; and mystic experiences, 132; *Nature*, 27; Nelson's criticisms of, 163, 171; in Oliver's work, 181; and Parker, influence on, 28; pragmatist tendencies in, 33; reputation of, in the late nineteenth century, 92–93, 101; and sixties counterculture, appeal to, 165
Emerson, William, 30, 31
Enlightenment, 1, 11, 13–17, 20

Ferrini, Vincent, 150
Feuerbach, Ludwig, 18, 30

Fields, James T., 97, 98
Free Religion: disagreement among advocates of, 42, 45; founding of group to promote, 40–41; transcendentalist roots of, 6
Free Religious Association, 40, 42, 44
Frothingham, Octavius Brooks: as clergyman of post-Christian congregation in New York City, 45; and Free Religious Association, as cofounder of, 40; on Free Religious Association founding convention, 41; and Free Religious Association publications, 43; as religious radical, 39
Fruitlands: and communitarians of 1960s and 1970s, 165; ridiculed in late nineteenth century, 91
Fuller, Buckminster, 164
Fuller, Margaret, 1; and androgyny, 176; and Concord School of Philosophy, 50, 58–59; and "Conversations," 32, 47

Gandhi, Mohandas, 148
Gilman, Lawrence, 108
Greaves, James Pierrepont, 47
Gregory, Brad, 13, 21

Hardack, Richard, 186, 192, 193, 198
Harris, William Torrey: and Concord School of Philosophy, cofounder of, 46, 47; —, courses of, 59; —, as director of, 48, 50; —, lectures at, 49, 51; and Hegelian philosophy, 57–58; and religious orthodoxy, embrace of, 58
Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 47, 49, 57, 64; biographical treatments of, 73, 74; in *Essays before a Sonata* (Ives), 96–98; in *Passion by the Brook* (Nelson), 155, 156
Hedge, Frederick Henry, 43, 50, 147
Henley, Don, 200
Herrmann, Bernard, 105
Higginson, Thomas Wentworth: and Brown, John, supporter of, 74; as Burns, Anthony, advocate for, 151, 200; and Chestnut Street Club, 43; and Concord School of Philosophy lectures, 48, 49; as "Free Religion" movement supporter, 44; as Free Religious Association cofounder, 41, 43; and memoirs of transcendentalism, 76; as religious radical, 39
Hillside Chapel, 46, 50
Holland, Fred May, 55
Howe, Julia Ward, 7, 42, 143; and Concord School of Philosophy, participation in, 50, 59, 61; and Radical Club, responses to, 43, 44
Howells, William Dean, 50, 62, 81, 192
human nature, 1, 40
Hume, David, 16, 19, 30–31
Huntington, Frederic Dan: biography of, 53; and criticism of transcendentalism, 53–54

Ives, Charles: biography, 86–88, 89; compositional method of, 110–12; conflicting early influences upon, 85–86; dense transcendentalism in, 34; Ives's influences on, 88; methodology in studying, 8–9; and modern music and culture, 103, 113; and New England writers, 87, 93–94; nicknames for, 84–85; nostalgia in, 36; Parker's influences on, 88–89; and "program music," 109–10; recognition of, in 1930s, 105–6
Ives, Charles, works of: *Concord* Sonata, composition of, 89; —, first performances of, 107–8; *Essays before a Sonata*, composition of, 89–90; —, "The Alcotts," 94–95; —, "Emerson," 101–3; —, "Hawthorne," 96–98; —, "Thoreau," 99–101
Ives, Harmony Twichell, 89, 90, 102, 105

James, Henry, *The Bostonians*: composition of, 61, 64; critical responses to,

64; Elizabeth Peabody satirized in, 3, 64, 66, 68
James, Henry, Sr., 40, 43
James, William, 33, 36, 144; and *The Bostonians* (James), responds to, 63–64; at Concord School of Philosophy, 61; and Peabody's reputation, 66
Johnson, Samuel, 36, 38, 91; and defense of Free Religion perspective, 38–40, 42, 43
Jones, Hiram, 47, 48, 49, 56

Kant, Immanuel, 2, 25, 27, 38, 51, 142
kindergarten movement, 32, 59, 143; and Peabody, 77–78, 82; and postwar social reform, 68–69, 72
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 7, 169, 217n8; influenced by Thoreau, 148–49

Lathrop, George Parsons, 51, 58
Longfellow, Samuel, 41

Mann, Mary Peabody, 63, 69
Matthiessen, Francis Otto, 145; as mentor to Nelson, 150–52
McCarthy, Joseph, 146
Mead, Edwin, 55, 57
Miller, Perry: as historian of transcendentalism, 11–12, 13, 34, 146, 170; Nelson's hostility toward, 159–62, 168; and Nelson's *The Sin of the Prophet*, reviews, 152; and Thoreau's "lost journal," edits, 158–59
Mystic Club, 47
mysticism, 132–33, 195, 202

National Endowment for the Humanities, 200
nature: and "fluid transcendentalism," 34–36, 174, 175; and "new materialism," 178–80; pre-Enlightenment views of, 22; transcendentalists' understanding of, 25, 31, 132–33, 144, 165
Nelson, Truman: biography of, 150; and Brown, John, 166–68; and civil rights/black power movements, 164, 168–70, 219n79; and Marxism, 146, 150; and Matthiessen, F. O., 150–51; and Miller, 146, 158–61, 168; and Thoreau, 158–62; and transcendentalism, 143, 163, 170–71
Nelson, Truman, works of: *The Passion by the Brook*, 154–58; *The Sin of the Prophet*, 151–54; *The Surveyor*, 166
Newcomb, Charles King, 156, 171
New Humanists, 93, 144
new materialists, 35, 146, 178–79, 181, 196
Night Thoreau Spent in Jail, The (Lawrence and Lee), 164
Norton, Andrews, 25–27, 31, 38–39
nostalgia, 7, 12, 34, 36, 78, 135, 183; as cultural phenomenon, 112–13; as psychological phenomenon, 84

Occupy movement, 7, 36
Oliver, Mary: critical views of, 183, 184; efforts of to overcome binary thinking, 182; Emerson's influence on, 181; "The Lilacs Break Open Over the Dark Water," 184–85; "The Sea," 182–83; and transcendentalism, 184

Paiutes (indigenous people), 63, 64, 78
Parker, Horatio, 86, 87, 88–89, 111
Parker, Theodore: Brownson's criticisms of, 30; and "A Discourse of the Transient and Permanent in Christianity," controversy surrounding, 28–29; Emerson's "Divinity School Address," attends, 28; posthumous reputation of, 39
Parrington, Vernon Louis, 106, 145
Peabody, Elizabeth: and Brook Farm, 71; and Comte, Auguste, 71; and Concord School of Philosophy, 55, 56, 59, 61; and early American history, 77–78; as educator, 32, 82; and German higher

Peabody, Elizabeth (*continued*)
criticism, 25–26; in James's *The Bostonians*, 3, 6, 63–69, 72–73; and kindergarten movement, 78–79; and later reformers, 6; and native Americans, 63; and the Radical Club, 43, 44; and transcendentalist reform movements, 32, 34, 47, 79
Peirce, Benjamin, 44–45
Peirce, Charles Sanders, 33, 45, 48
Pestalozzi, Johann Heinrich, 47
Phelps, William Lyon, 84–85, 89, 90, 101
Phillips, Wendell, 44, 45, 48, 160, 163
pragmatism, 33; Santayana suggests as corrective to transcendentalism's idealism, 144
Proust, Marcel, 84

Radical, 38–43
Radical Club, 43–45
Reformation, 21, 22, 29
Ripley, Sophia, 7, 147; as portrayed in *The Passion by the Brook* (Nelson), 155, 157
romantic love, 70, 159
Rowe, John Carlos, 197
Rudhyar, Dane, 107

Sanborn, Franklin Benjamin: as abolitionist, 73–74; as biographer, 74–75; and Concord School of Philosophy, 47–50, 56, 57, 59; and Thoreau, as editor of, 75–76
Santayana, George, 143–44, 147, 216n1
Sargent, John T., 43, 44
Sargent, Mary Elizabeth Fiske, 43, 45
Schulz, Kathryn, 198
Scudder, Horace, 97–98
secularism, 4; eighteenth- and nineteenth-century versions of, 15, 18; twentieth-century versions of, 19
secularity: and Berger, Peter, 21; and Casanova, Jose, 12, 203n2; as characteristic of contemporary cultural moment, 83; as characteristic of transcendentalism, 2–5, 7, 13, 33, 84; and Cornell, 115, 116, 147; and cultural cohesion, 84, 96, 102, 112; in Oliver, 184; and Taylor, Charles, 4, 6, 21–24; in Thoreau, 174; and Unitarian identity, as challenge to, 28
secularization, 4; and challenges to its global application, 20, 22; defined by Bruce, Steve, 19; defined by Casanova, Jose, 203n2
Slonimsky, Nicolas, 105, 106
Smith, Christian, 24, 31, 204n19
social reform: and antebellum transcendentalism, 6, 12, 81, 84, 200; late-nineteenth-century attitudes toward, 6, 69–70
Stevens, Wallace, 7, 36, 149
Stevenson, Robert Louis, 99, 198
Strachey, Lytton, 73
Strauss, David Friedrich, 17–18, 27, 28
Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, 149
Students for a Democratic Society, 201
surrealism, 115, 120–21, 124, 134

Taylor, Charles, 13, 170, 174; criticism of his approach, 24, 178; and "fragilization," 211n1; *A Secular Age*, 22–24; and theory of secularity, 4–5, 6; and transcendentalism's secularity, 33, 83–84, 202
Temple School: and educational reform, 47, 69; as transcendentalist reform, 32; and transcendentalist views of the child, 139
Thoreau, Henry David: Beston's attitudes toward, 180, 181; Cosbey's celebration of, 201; Dillard's reliance on, 186, 187, 189, 191, 194; evocations of childhood in, 135; and "fluid transcendentalism," 9, 13, 34–36, 175–80, 184; influence on ecological theory and practice,

174; influence on twentieth-century reform, 147–49, 164, 173, 217n8; Ives's essay on, 99–101, 111; Miller's treatments of, 159, 162, 170; and mystic experiences, 132; Nelson's attitudes toward, 159–62, 170, 171; Sanborn's biography of, 75; Sanborn's editions of, 75–76; Schultz's criticisms of, 198; Stevenson's criticisms of, 198–99; and transcendentalist reforms, 32, 200; and Walden Pond, 50. *See also* Ives, Charles; Miller, Perry; Nelson, Truman
Thoreau, Henry David, works of: "Civil Disobedience," 148, 162, 164; *The Dispersion of Seeds*, 177–78; *The Maine Woods*, 189; *Walden*, 186, 187, 198, 201; —, Miller's treatment of, 159
Tocqueville, Alexis de, 197
transcendentalism: and American culture, continuing presence in, 9, 10, 199–201; and changing critical perceptions, 1–4, 197–99; "dense transcendentalism," defined, 33–35; "fluid transcendentalism," defined, 5, 9, 33–36; and secularity, as example of, 2, 5, 12–13. *See also under individual authors*

Unitarianism, 23, 24; denominational identity debated, 38–40; Huntington's criticism of, 53

Very, Jones, 147, 186; and "fluid transcendentalism," 35, 175

Walden Woods Project, 200
Walls, Laura Dassow, 177, 178, 181
Ward, Julius, 50, 52
Wasson, David, 39, 47, 48, 51; and founding of Free Religious Association, 41–44
Weber, Max, 4, 19, 22, 174, 178
West Street Bookshop, 32, 47, 92
Whiting, Lillian, 56
Wiggin, Kate Douglas, 56, 78
Winnemucca, Sarah, 63, 64, 66
women's rights movements, 36, 64, 79, 166

Young Americans, 93, 144